Beyond Stewardship:

The Search for a Truly Ecological Christian Spirituality

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Abstract

The object of this research is to discover how Christianity can be reformed so that it could provide the foundation of a truly ecological spirituality. It is the contention of the thesis that the planet currently faces an ecological crisis that has largely been brought about by human activity, encouraged by a particular world-view, which sees the non-human creation as of no value in itself and merely an object to be used. The work argues that those who see traditional Christian theology as a contributory factor in this destructive world-view are correct.

The first chapter of the thesis seeks to describe the crisis and define the terms "ecology" and "Christian spirituality". Chapter Two examines the mainstream Christian response to the ecological crisis thus far, namely the "stewardship approach", and argues that this approach has serious weaknesses. Chapter Three strives to move beyond stewardship and looks specifically at how the person of Jesus of Nazareth can become a focus for ecological thinking. Chapter Four continues this theme by exploring images of the Christ, with the aim of showing how these images can encourage an ecological awareness and practice. Chapter Five looks at other faiths and forms of thought which give insights that could be resources in the journey towards an ecological Christian spirituality. Finally, Chapter Six sets out to formulate such a spirituality, looking at its theology, liturgy, and practice as well as at the spirituality itself.

Overall, the thesis is a contribution to the growing field of Ecotheology. It seeks to show how Christianity can move from being a part of the ecological problem to encouraging a transformative praxis that could offer hope of a solution to the crisis by effecting a fundamental change of heart in its adherents through the spirituality it engenders.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Prof. Ursula King
for her support, encouragement, patience, and friendship,
to all the staff in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies
for their help,
and to Jane for being there.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed..... K. Ricci .....Date..... 30.4.03 .....

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Introduction

I.1: Aim

It is becoming clear that as we progress through the early years of this new century in the history of humanity, we are increasingly going to face problems concerning the continued existence of the human race on this planet. For some, the answer to those problems is to seek to find some other planet on which to live, and plans are already at quite an advanced stage to establish a human colony on Mars, for example.

For others, the answer is to simply ignore the problems and to carry on regardless in the hope that they will go away. Still others claim that the problems do not actually exist and are a figment of the doom merchants' imagination. Nevertheless, the evidence continues to mount that things are very seriously amiss and that the future of life on earth, even human life, is in doubt unless things change dramatically.[1]

It is the contention of this thesis that a large part of the blame for this situation must be put at the door of a particular world-view which sees nature as nothing more than a resource for human use, a commodity which has only a financial or utilitarian value. It is also my belief that traditional Christian doctrines of creation and of human domination over the non-human have contributed to this world-

[1] For example, on the BBC Breakfast Television News on Wednesday 9th April 2003, there was a report from scientists meeting in Norwich that global warming is accelerating and now threatens to cause the extinction of any animal species that is not able to adapt quickly enough.

view. Furthermore, the Church has engendered a belief that this world is, in any case, transitory (and even evil) and that we should concentrate instead on life in the next world. This has led to the view among many adherents of Christianity that the ecological crisis is simply a part of the process by which God is bringing this world to an end.

This thesis challenges all of the above views and is based upon the premise that we must address the ecological crisis as a matter of urgency for the sake of all life on planet Earth. It is my belief, however, that the only way this can be done successfully is by a fundamental change of heart on the part of those who hold the view that the non-human creation is of no value in itself. Such a fundamental change can only be brought about by engendering within people a spirituality that encompasses the whole of humanity and the whole of creation.

Such a spirituality could, I am sure, arise out of any or all of the religions known to humanity. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I am concentrating on my own faith, namely Christianity. It is therefore the aim of this work to explore the possibility of formulating a truly ecological Christian spirituality.

I.2: Background

My own interest in the two subjects of ecology and Christian spirituality initially developed separately, with my concern for the environment predating my involvement in Christianity by about ten years.

From a young age I have had a fascination for the natural world and have always appreciated the wonder and beauty of this planet and all life upon it. I am still moved by a stunning sunset and would count nature documentaries as among the programmes on television that I would try to watch if at all possible. In my early twenties, I became more politically aware, as well as becoming increasingly concerned by the harm that we were doing to the world around us. I decided that I could not just sit back and do nothing and so I joined the local branch of what was then the Ecology Party, which has since become the Green Party.

For about three years, whilst living on the South Coast of England, I was very actively involved locally and took part in demonstrations to conserve wildlife areas and breeding grounds and the like, as well as lobbying local and national politicians. I still own one square foot of a butterfly meadow that was divided up and sold to hundreds of different people, in order to make compulsory purchase a virtual impossibility and so save the meadow from being turned into a housing estate.

I then moved to the Orkney Islands, with my wife and two small children, and bought a small croft on the island of Shapinsay. There I lived out much of what I had only thought about before. We became virtually self-sufficient, farming goats for milk and meat, keeping chickens and ducks for eggs and meat, and growing all our own vegetables. We also made and sold a vegetarian goat's cheese. We did everything organically, using seaweed and goat manure to fertilise our crops, and feeding our animals only natural, organically-grown food.

This provided us with a very rewarding existence although it was physically very hard and there was very little financial return. The most rewarding thing was working closely with nature, in an environment that could be the most beautiful place on earth one day and the most hostile the next. This experience made me more committed than ever to campaigning for sustainable lifestyles and against the destruction of the natural world.

It was also while living on Shapinsay that I became involved with the Church. That involvement led me to train as a Local Preacher (the Methodist equivalent to a Lay Reader) and eventually on to ministerial training. The latter meant that we had to give up our life on the croft and move to Bristol to train at Wesley College. Throughout the early years of my involvement I was busy learning the traditional doctrines and practices of the Methodist Church and did not make much connection between that and my ecological interests.

However, while training for the Methodist Ministry, I was given the opportunity to take a degree in Theology and Religious Studies at Bristol University. It was during my time as an undergraduate that my environmental concern was renewed and I began to link it more closely with my theological studies and my work in the Church. Of particular interest to me, therefore, was a second year unit entitled "Environmental Theology", which was taught by Anne Primavesi.[2] This unit introduced me to what was then a new subject for me personally and a relatively new one for theology as a whole.

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[2] Dr Anne Primavesi is a freelance theologian who specialises in ecological and ecofeminist issues. She has published several books and articles including: *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1991; and "Biodiversity and responsibility: a basis for a non-violent environmental ethic", *Faith and Praxis in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Ursula King, London: Cassell, 1998: 47-59.

Encouraged by the discovery that there was such a thing as environmental theology, despite there being very little mention of anything like it in the units of the ministerial training course at Wesley College, I decided to do further research on the subject for my third year dissertation. Under the supervision of Anne Primavesi, I wrote my dissertation on "Breaking the Structures of Domination: the Contribution of an Environmental Theology". I began by identifying the origins, nature, and consequences of the structures of domination within human society; that is the military, religious, social and political structures that govern our lives. It is these structures, I argued, that contribute to the degradation of the environment. I then went on to examine the role of traditional Christian theology in the setting up, perpetuating and sanctioning these structures. The final section looked at how a new Christian theology, specifically an environmental one, might play a part in the breaking of these structures to enable a more just and ecologically sustainable human society.

Since completing my degree, I have continued my research of which the present work is the culmination. I have also been working full-time as a Methodist Minister and the combination of the two has provided me with a unique opportunity. I have been able to pursue my interest in ecology and the protection of the natural world, whilst at the same time working within an institution that upholds a traditional religion that is considered by many (including myself) to be a contributing factor to the world-view that sees the non-human as of no value in itself and only there for human use and abuse, or as a backdrop for the drama of human salvation.

For me personally, this has meant a certain amount of tension. On the one hand, I have been appalled by how little attention the Church has given or does give to environmental matters. Some small amount of lip service is occasionally given and one or two liturgical concessions have been forthcoming. In general, however, the natural world gets scant mention within the Church, except perhaps for harvest thanksgiving services.

On the other hand, it is only from working within the organisation, that I can hope to play some small part in changing that sorry situation. I am at least able to make sure that environmental concerns and theology do play a larger part in the worship that I lead, even though this has occasionally led to me being branded a heretic. I have also been able to set up small groups of church members to look at environmental theology and think about ecological issues more deeply in relation to their faith.

Furthermore, there is a growing part of my work as a Minister that is about being there pastorally for those who are affected by the ecological crisis and have deep and genuine worries about the future. These range from those who are disturbed by news reports that they hear concerning the environmental problems we face, to those who are angered by the lack of political action concerning ecological issues, and on to those who are simply worried about what kind of world their grandchildren will have to grow up in. Often such people find no help in a Church that seems to largely ignore these issues itself. I hope that my studies in this field

will be an encouragement to such people and help them to realise that their faith can be relevant to their concerns.

In the longer term I would hope to be able to do even more and maybe encourage the wider Church to look more seriously at theses issues. During my time in Bristol I did offer to teach a unit on environmental theology at Wesley College but my offer was never taken up. Nevertheless, it is still my hope that this thesis may become a resource that could be used to promote further study, reflection, and action within the Church on this vital subject.

In the meantime, I continue to be concerned that we live in a world where large parts of the human population (mainly in the rich North) still pursue lifestyles that show little or no regard for other (poorer) people or the natural world; and I continue to work in a Christian Church that is still more concerned with the next world (which may not even exist) than it is with this world and concentrates almost exclusively on the salvation of human souls (whatever they are) to the detriment of the salvation of the whole of creation. This, therefore, is the context in which this research has been undertaken.

I.3: Methodology and structure

The methodology followed by this thesis is essentially similar to that used by many feminist theologians; that is one of description, deconstruction, and reconstruction. The structure of the work is set out accordingly.

Chapter One, therefore, begins the descriptive phase. In this chapter, the ecological crisis is examined through reports from organisations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and through the work of people like botanist Ghillean Prance, who is also a committed Christian. The main elements of the crisis are described; namely, human population growth, global warming and the "greenhouse effect", ozone depletion, pollution, species extinction and the destruction of biodiversity. Through looking at these various issues, the fact of the ecological crisis is established and I then go on to show that the solution to these environmental problems concerns not only science, politics, and economics but also philosophy, art, and, most importantly for this particular work, religion.

Having set the ecological context, the chapter continues the descriptive dimension by defining the two main terms of the thesis; "Christian spirituality" and "ecology". Defining the first of these is far from easy as there is no universal definition of Christian spirituality. The chapter therefore looks at several different descriptions and shows why some are not adequate for an ecological spirituality, which needs as inclusive a definition as it is possible to have; that is, one that is about the whole of life and not just one aspect of it.

Defining ecology is the next task of this first chapter and this is done by way of a general history of the science of ecology, followed by a description of each of the branches of ecology now in existence; namely, scientific ecology, social ecology, shallow ecology, deep ecology, and Christian ecology. In the case of each branch an assessment is made as to its helpfulness or otherwise to this particular project.

The first sections of Chapter Two are also a part of the descriptive element of the thesis and set out to examine the "stewardship approach". This approach has been the most common response put forward by Christian theologians in answer to the accusations that Christianity has contributed to the present ecological crisis. It forms the basis of the Church's attempt to establish its green credentials. The chapter begins by exploring the evolution of stewardship within the churches, from its narrow beginnings when it was applied mainly to financial stewardship, through its gradual widening out to other aspects of church life, to its finally being applied to our stewardship of creation.

I then go on to describe the main characteristics of the approach, recognising that there is, once again, not one homogenous version of stewardship but many similar versions. I therefore look at the aspects that are common to most of the literature and theology that promotes the notion of stewardship of creation. All come from the same root; that is, a reinterpretation of the word "dominion", found in Genesis 1:28, to make it more in line with a caring, caretaking role. I show how it is from this root that a theology of stewardship is derived and illustrate where this theology has influenced the liturgy and worship of the Church in this country in recent years.

The final section of Chapter Two examines both the strengths and the weaknesses of the stewardship approach in the light of the current ecological crisis. Although the approach does have some features that commend it to both traditional and environmentally aware Christians, as well as obviously being better than a theology of domination, I argue that the weaknesses outweigh the strengths. This

moves the thesis into the deconstructive phase as the stewardship approach is shown to be inadequate as a theological response to the very serious situation humanity faces environmentally. Furthermore, I conclude that stewardship would not have the depth to really fundamentally change people's attitudes concerning the natural world, nor would it be able to engender a truly ecological Christian spirituality.

Given this negative conclusion on the usefulness of the stewardship approach, Chapter Three begins the move beyond stewardship. In particular, this chapter concentrates on the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as he is reported by the writers of the New Testament and as he has been portrayed by the Christian Church through the centuries. This is both a deconstructive and reconstructive exercise. On the deconstructive side, I look at where the traditional images of Jesus have been, or are, unhelpful from an ecological perspective. This includes a critical consideration of the supernatural aspects of these traditional images.

However, I balance that with a reconstruction of a picture of Jesus that can enable him to become a legitimate spearhead for ecological concern, while always bearing in mind the fact that he lived in a very different world to the one we now inhabit. This reconstruction takes the form of a reinterpretation of Jesus' teachings and actions in the light of the current crisis; a crisis he himself did not face and so did not address directly. The chapter concludes with a re-examination of the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the light of an ecological paradigm.

Chapter Four continues the same kind of deconstructive/reconstructive exercise but moves on to specifically consider the image of Christ. I begin by looking at the Hebrew "Messiah" figure and how this image of the Christ can be used in an environmental theology. In contrast to that image, I then go on to examine the image of Christ as "fully divine", in keeping with some of the New Testament writings and the declarations of the early Church, culminating in the statement from the Council of Chalcedon; which has become the benchmark for Christian orthodoxy regarding the person of Christ. Once again, this orthodox image can be shown to be problematic from an ecological point of view and so, having illustrated that, I discuss how the image might be reconstructed in a way that can speak to the ecological concerns of our day.

However, even that is not enough in itself, because the traditional image of Christ does not exist in isolation; the Christ is also the Second Person of the Trinity and has, therefore, to be considered in relation to trinitarian doctrine. That is the task undertaken in the next section of this chapter. This presents other problems for an environmental theology; not least of which is the language used to describe the Trinity, particularly the traditional trinitarian formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Having looked at these problems, I discuss several other models of the Trinity and assess each of those with regard to an ecological spirituality. I also look at the importance of the relational aspects of the Trinity for such a spirituality.

The final section of the fourth chapter examines the image of the cosmic Christ, an image that has long been associated with a more inclusive and universalist

view of Christianity. It is an image that has been associated with writers like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Matthew Fox, and has much to commend it in the search for an ecological spirituality.

In Chapter Five I leave behind the deconstructive dimension and look fully to the task of reconstruction. This chapter is concerned with some of the building blocks for such a reconstruction and considers how we might widen our horizons as we search for a truly ecological Christian spirituality. To that end, I look at a variety of sources to see what insights they might be able to offer which would aid the formulation of that spirituality.

I look first at the spiritualities of indigenous peoples like the North American Indians and the Maori people of New Zealand. These peoples had (and still have where they have survived) an understanding of and reverence for nature that many people in the industrialised nations have long since lost. Their spiritualities reflect this and are, therefore, of great value in the promotion of an ecological awareness and a respect for the non-human creation.

Next, I consider the work of feminist and ecofeminist theologians and writers. The challenge of feminist theology to traditional Christianity, and particularly to the language and imagery used by the Church, opens up the way for new language and imagery which is more helpful and meaningful both to women and in the search for a truly green Christianity. The feminist critique of notions of hierarchy and dualism, and the ecofeminist identification of links between the mistreatment

of women and of nature, both offer valuable insights into how Christianity might be radically changed in favour of an ecological paradigm.

Many eastern religions also provide insights that can be used in the formulation of an ecological Christian spirituality. These insights are explored here as I look at the larger eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as considering lesser known faiths such as Baha'ism and Jainism. Many of these faiths have arisen out of cultures which are very different to that from which western Christianity has developed, and they are, therefore, able to bring different perspectives to their respective spiritualities.

In the next part of this chapter, I examine other forms of Christianity that have also grown out of very different contexts to our own. The first of these is eastern Orthodox Christianity, which has concentrated much more on the whole creation in its theology, liturgy, and worship than has been the case in the western Church. I then go on to look at the insights of liberation theology, particularly from Latin America, where the poorest people feel an affinity with nature and see the suffering of creation as being the result of the same kind of attitudes that have caused their own suffering. Switching continents, I move on to consider the African Earthkeeping Churches, who have already developed new liturgies which directly link their environmental concern with their worship.

The final section of Chapter Five looks at Celtic Christianity, which has remained close to its Celtic origins and is consequently still characterised by a reverence for nature. Through a consideration of this and all the other faiths, theologies and

spiritualities in this chapter, I show that there is a wealth of resources that can be drawn from in the journey towards a truly ecological Christian spirituality.

Chapter Six completes the reconstruction phase of the thesis. Having deconstructed traditional Christianity and its slight adaptation under the stewardship approach, I seek in this chapter to formulate a truly ecological alternative. This is done in four separate yet interconnected sections. I begin by setting out the type of environmental theology which is capable of engendering an ecological spirituality. In the second section, I explore the nature of that ecological spirituality.

It could be argued that such an exploration should be the final section of the work. However, I hope that I will have illustrated by this point why that is not the case. I therefore go on to the next two sections of this chapter, which concern the liturgy and practice of an environmental Christianity. Both of these are vital for a truly ecological Christian spirituality, if it is to be effective in bringing about a radical change in the hearts and minds of people and so play a part in the solution to the present ecological crisis.

What follows is an attempt to make Christianity more relevant to the environmental situation humanity now faces, as well as perhaps making a small contribution towards a more sustainable future for the rich variety of life we share this planet with.

Chapter One: Determining Context and Defining Terms

1.1: The Context

The first task of any work of this kind must be to define the terms that have a central place in the thesis. This is important because it helps to clarify what follows, as well as focussing the attention of both writer and reader on what is fundamental to this particular project. In the case of this work, the two terms that form the basis to the study are *Christian spirituality* and *ecology*. Consequently, this first chapter will attempt to define both of these terms in a way that will be helpful to the rest of the research.

However, it is not enough to simply define these terms as if they exist in a vacuum, neither influencing nor being influenced by anything outside themselves. Peter Charles King, a former postgraduate student at Bristol University, devoted his MLitt. thesis to "The Context of Spirituality" and wrote in his Introduction that he was "mindful of the need to locate 'spirituality' within a framework of reference to the context - of both faith and life - within which.....it finds its meaning."[1] This is a view with which I would agree. Even something as difficult to "pin down" as spirituality cannot be left floating around in mid-air. Rather it must be anchored to some kind of faith or a particular way of life, if it is to have any meaning or relevance.

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[1] Peter Charles King, *The Context of Spirituality*, A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Letters, 1992: 3.

To some extent, adding the word *Christian* does at least locate spirituality within a particular faith framework, but even then Christian faith still needs to be lived within a context. And, if it is true that *Christian spirituality* needs to be considered within a framework of reference, then the same is surely true of *ecology*. Charles Cummings, in his book *Eco-Spirituality*, makes the following observation:

> Both ecology and spirituality deal with a common reality: the material cosmos, the world where humanity dwells together with all the plants and animals.....No-one escapes the fact of being situated in this world, in physical, material reality. The living human spirit is always enfleshed in a material body, always a being in the world with other beings, all interacting and interdependent.[2]

It is necessary, therefore, to identify that context with reference to this particular study, and only then to go on to consider the definitions of the above terms as they relate to that context.

As the particular concern of this work is the search for a truly ecological Christian spirituality, the context is essentially that of the present ecological situation, or to be even more specific, the environmental and ecological crisis faced by humanity in the early years of the third millennium of the Common Era. This crisis has been well documented over the last decade or so and is the ongoing subject of many scientific reports. Furthermore, it has been examined and reflected upon in several

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[2] Charles Cummings, *Eco-Spirituality: Toward a Reverent Life*, New York: Paulist Press, 1991: 1.

recent theological works.[3] It is not my intention, therefore, to go into a great deal of detail about the present situation, which is in any case changing all the time. Nevertheless, it is necessary to at least establish that what we are currently facing is an ecological crisis, as that crisis is the foundation of much of what will follow. It is also necessary to mention the potentially disastrous consequences of ignoring our present ecological circumstances, because underlying the whole thesis is the hope that humanity can avoid the worst of those consequences. I therefore intend to simply outline some of the major elements of the ecological crisis, so as to firmly establish its reality. Many of the facts and figures in this outline are taken from the much more detailed work of Ghillean Prance, *The Earth Under Threat: A Christian Perspective*.[4]

Prance begins by identifying what he believes to be the most important underlying reason for the crisis:

> Population is the fundamental root of the environmental crisis and the most important issue to address if there is to be any future for humankind. The issue of population is also the one which the Church tends to ignore the most or even oppose discussing because of the ethical issues involved.[5]

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[3] For example: Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth*, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991; Tim Cooper, *Green Christianity*, London: Spire, 1990; David Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheolgy: Voices from South and North*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994; Keith Innes, *Caring for the Earth*, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1991; Sean McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986; Ghillean Prance, *The Earth Under Threat: A Christian Perspective*, Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1996; Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1991; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*, London: SCM, 1993; *et al.*

[4] Ghillean Prance, *The Earth Under Threat: A Christian Perspective*, Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1996: 28-51. Ghillean Prance is the Director of Kew Gardens.

[5] *ibid.*, 28. Here Prance immediately identifies a tension between the environmental situation and the response (or lack of response) to it from the churches.

He then goes on to detail the basic statistics on population which support his claim, including the fact that it took the worldwide population from the dawn of humanity until the year 1830 CE to reach the figure of one billion, and yet only a further one hundred years to reach double that number. Forty years later, in 1970, it had doubled again to four billion and reached five billion in 1987. Currently, the human population of the earth stands at around six billion and, although the global fertility rate[6] has reduced from 4.5 in 1970-75 to 3.1 in 1990-95, it is still possible that by the year 2050, the worldwide human population will have reached a staggering 9.4 billion. At the present rate of growth, ninety million people are added to the world population every year, which equals ten thousand, eight hundred an hour. Between seven and eight per cent of all human beings who have ever lived on this planet are alive today.

The problem is emphasised by the fact that, in the non-industrialized countries, fifty per cent of the population is under reproductive age and fertility rates are not dropping as quickly as in other parts of the world. In Africa, for example, the fertility rate has only dropped from 6.6 to 5.8 over the last twenty-five years, and even this reduction has been patchy with 23 per cent of African nations seeing no decrease at all, and 17 per cent actually seeing an increase.[7] Prance comments that "humankind is ignoring the basic biological fact that any organism whose

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[6] The fertility rate is calculated as the number of children per woman over the course of her reproductive life.

[7] World Resources Institute, *World Resources 1996-97*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996: 192.

population rises above its resource capacity is bound to crash."[8] In simplest terms it comes down to the biological law of "limits to growth", a law the human species is subject to just as other species are. Our journey to that point of collapse is likely to be one of snowballing problems:

> Increased population leads to a shortage of resources and hence to social unrest and fighting over their distribution, to destruction of the natural environment through the greater demand for food and other products, to greater use of energy and consequently greater pollution, to increase in carbon dioxide and loss of the ozone layer.....and eventually to the extinction of many biological species.[9]

Already the signs are there. Three hundred and eighty-four million people are starving in our world and hundreds of millions of others have serious calorific deficiencies in their diets. Yet over a million people are added to the world's population every four days. And, although there is thought to be enough food to feed the present population if it were to be more evenly distributed, the question needs to be asked as to how much longer that will remain the case. An American Association of Science report, in 1994, stated that: "To do nothing to control population numbers is to condemn future humans to a lifetime of absolute poverty, suffering, starvation, disease and associated violent conflicts."[10]

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[8] The same point is made rather more forcibly by Mark Cawardine on behalf of the World Wildlife Fund, who states: "If we leave it to nature to solve the population problem, before the end of the next century there are likely to be environmental and human catastrophes that would dwarf anything ever seen to date." Mark Cawardine, *The WWF Environment Handbook*, London: Optima, 1990.
[9] Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 29. Again, this is emphasised by a similar claim in *The WWF Environment Handbook*: "As our population grows and as we drive animals and plants to extinction, drain wetlands, throw toxic wastes into the sea, pollute the atmosphere, poison drinking water and exhaust the soils, we are destroying the planet's life support system and threatening the future of all life on Earth." Cawardine, *op. cit.*, 1990: xi.
[10] As quoted in Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 30.

Doing something quickly to stabilize world population is, therefore, vital if the current ecological crisis is not to become far worse. Furthermore, it is up to us in the rich nations to fully play our part in the solution, rather than thinking that population control is only an issue for the developing countries to deal with. Indeed, even though our population increase (around 116,000 a year in Britain and continuing to decline) is smaller than that of most Third World countries, it is necessary to balance that with the fact that each person in the U.K. has far more of an environmental impact than those in the poorer nations. In *Sex, Sin, and Survival*, a Channel Four television documentary on the problems of population, it was stated:

> .....isn't it the height of hypocrisy to get all steamed up about overpopulation in the South, while systematically ignoring overconsumption in the North? And isn't it just a little shaming that we're so keen to see developing countries working on a population policy, when we wouldn't dream of having one ourselves, even though every one of us does a great deal more environmental damage than every one of them?[11]

Johnathan Porritt, the environmental campaigner and former director of Greenpeace, who fronted the programme, was in no doubt as to where the real blame lay on the problem of overpopulation:

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[11] *Sex, Sin, and Survival*, an edited transcript of the programme transmitted on 8 September 1994, Channel Four Television: 20. The terms "North" and "South" have come to be alternatives to those of "First World" and "Third World" respectively; reflecting the fact that, broadly speaking, the rich nations are in the northern hemisphere, whilst the poor nations are in the southern hemisphere.

> If the earth's life-support systems are eventually crushed by sheer weight of human numbers, as some predict, then future generations should know where to look for the reason - not so much in the Third World slums, but in the short-sighted indifference and cruel deceits of the world's richer nations.[12]

Even the present weight of human numbers is putting a considerable strain on the natural regulatory systems of the planet. One of the ways in which this can be seen is through climate change, and more particularly through what has become known as *the greenhouse effect*. The term, greenhouse effect, was first used in 1863 to describe the perfectly natural phenomenon of how the earth's atmosphere traps some of the sun's heat, thus keeping the climate conducive to life. However, within the last twenty years the term has come to prominence in environmental debate and has taken on a new and more disturbing meaning.

Today, the greenhouse effect refers to the fact that global temperatures are rising at an unprecedented rate (global warming), due to the unnatural concentrations of gases such as carbon dioxide, halocarbons, methane and nitrous oxide that now exist in our atmosphere as a result of human activity. These gases are known as "greenhouse gases" because of their ability to trap the sun's heat. The higher the concentrations of these gases in the atmosphere, the more the sun's heat is trapped and the warmer the earth's climate becomes.

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[12] *ibid.*, 21. Daniel C. Maguire makes a similar point in his essay "Population, Consumption, Ecology: The Triple Problematic" and goes so far as to call the developed nations "overdeveloped ecological barbarians". *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, eds. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, Harvard University Press, 2000: 403-427.

This effect is easy to measure. For example the decade of the 1980s was 0.5 degrees centigrade hotter than the 1880s, and the decade of the 1990s was the hottest period on record.[13] Predicting future change, however, is not such an exact science and estimates vary quite widely. Nevertheless, the most commonly accepted predictions suggest a three degrees centigrade rise over the next one hundred years.[14] This can be put into context by the fact that a five degrees centigrade rise would be enough to melt all the permanent Arctic ice. That ice is already thinning as research by the Scott Polar Research Institute in Britain has shown. Through their measurements they have found that the ice at the North Pole has thinned by up to a third in the last decade.[15] The melting of polar ice causes global sea levels to rise. Within the next forty years, sea levels could rise by as much as 20 centimetres.[16] Such a rise would threaten not only low-lying islands and countries like Bangladesh, but also many of the world's great centres of population; like London, for example.

That could be why global warming and the greenhouse effect are being taken so seriously by so many of the world's governments. Conferences on climate change have become almost annual events. Since the Convention on Climate Change at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, there have been conferences at Kyoto in 1997 and at Buenos Aires in 1998. Nevertheless, despite the many fine words and articulate agreements that have come from these high-powered meetings, it has to be said that so far very little action has actually been taken to reduce or even to

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[13] See Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 33.
[14] According to B.B.C. Breakfast News, 2 November 1998.
[15] Cawardine, *op. cit.*, 1990: 35.
[16] Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 34.

stabilize the world's emissions of greenhouse gases. Even today, some 78% of the world's energy is produced through the burning of fossil fuels, with the United States of America (a country that has consistently resisted calls for cuts in emissions and has recently refused to ratify the Kyoto agreement) still by far the worst offender.

Perhaps a major reason for this lack of concrete steps to reduce these harmful emissions, is the cost that would be involved to the industrialised nations of carrying out what would be necessary to effect a truly global reduction. The developed nations are at present the highest users of energy and thus produce the largest quantities of greenhouse gases. Stabilizing or reducing these emissions would therefore require the nations of the North to make the biggest adjustment to their present expectations concerning energy use. This situation is exacerbated, when the desire of the developing countries to continue their development is added to the equation. Mick Kelly and Susan Subak of the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia, comment that:

> It should be noted.....that given the aspirations of the developing world this (a cut in global emissions) could only be achieved with massive resource transfers from North to South. The same end might be more equitably achieved through deeper cuts in Northern emissions, allowing a continual rise in the Southern contribution.[17]

[17] Mick Kelly and Susan Subak, 'How deep must the cuts be?', *Tiempo*, no. 11, 1994: 5. Kelly and Subak based their observations on a computer model of the goal of stabilizing emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000.

It is clear that this is no simple case of cutting emissions across the board, but rather it involves issues of redistribution and social justice between the countries of the North and South. Such a drastic and complicated step, though necessary if the greenhouse effect is to be slowed, would require a strongly ecologically-based political and social will to see it through to its completion. Inevitably it would mean the radical rethinking of the accepted energy policies of most of the richer nations, resulting in just as radical a revision of personal lifestyles and expectations.

Furthermore, this needs to be done sooner rather than later, because later may just turn out to be too late. Already senior government scientific advisers in Britain are warning that millions of people will die as a result of global warming and millions of others will be made homeless by flooding, whilst more than one billion will face serious water shortages. Their message to us all is that "time is running out because the changes have already begun".[18] Similar warnings have come from other sources, including the then United States Secretary of State James Baker the third, who pointed out in his maiden speech to the International Panel on Climate Change:

> We face the prospect of being trapped on a boat we have irreparably damaged - not by the cataclysm of war, but by the slow neglect of a vessel we believed to be impervious to our abuse.....[19]

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[18] As reported in The Guardian newspaper, 'Millions will die in global warming', Thursday 22 October, 1998: 12.
[19] As quoted in Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 40.

The prospect voiced by James Baker is made all the more real by the fact that global warming is not the only consequence that arises from our insistence on pumping pollution into the atmosphere. In 1985, scientists from the British Antarctic survey discovered a hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica. The cause of this hole was later traced to chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's). In 1991, the hole measured 21 million square kilometres, or approximately four times the size of the United States of America. That same year, the United Nations Environment Programme, working with the World Meteorologist Organisation, announced that the ozone shield was thinning over northern temperate latitudes as well. Since then the reports have continued to come in: 1992, ozone loss in the northern temperate regions was twice as much as expected; 1994, ozone levels over Europe were 10% below average and Antarctica had the lowest concentration of ozone ever recorded; 1996, the ozone hole over Britain was the deepest ever recorded.[20]

Ozone is an essential component of the upper atmosphere of our planet. It protects life on earth by reducing the amount of ultraviolet radiation that reaches the surface. The depletion of the ozone layer is already having an effect on some plants and animals, including human beings. In countries like Argentina, Chile, Australia and New Zealand, human skin cancer rates are on the increase, and reports are beginning to come in of blind rabbits and salmon, and deformed tree buds. Ghillean Prance also records another disturbing trend:

> Many amphibian species such as frogs and toads are suffering an unprecedented decline.....at both tropical and temperate latitudes.....

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[20] *ibid.*, 40-41.

> This is almost certainly the result of some environmental change. Amphibians, with their thin skins, are both extremely susceptible to pollutants and sensitive to ultra-violet radiation.....Could amphibians be the equivalent of the miners' canaries that are sending us a message about a serious danger?[21]

It is likely that the answer to Prance's question is an emphatic yes. However, even if we do not heed this clear warning from the amphibians, there are other species of life on earth that are sending us similar messages. In particular, the trees of the earth are dying in large numbers because of another consequence of atmospheric pollution, known as acid rain. Acid rain is caused by sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides which, when pumped into the atmosphere in the quantities we are now seeing, can turn rain as acid as vinegar. The disastrous effects of this damaging rain when it falls are well documented, as, for example, this extract from a report by the World-Wide Fund for Nature:

> Damage from acid rain is particularly severe in Germany, where 50 per cent of the forests are damaged or dying; 40 per cent of the forests of Switzerland are dying and 38 per cent in Sweden. One survey in Britain revealed that 64 per cent of all trees show at least some signs of damage.
>
> Acid rain destroys lakes and rivers as well. Sweden has 90,000 lakes, and 4,000 of them are too acidic.....to support fish or any other aquatic life; a further 18,000 have experienced some acidification.....One in

[21] *ibid.*, 41-42.

five of the lakes in the United States is now fishless for the same reason.[22]

The widespread incidence of acid rain, often falling in countries that are not the worst polluters, only serves to illustrate the fact that pollution knows no boundaries. Pollutants pumped into the air can be carried on the wind and affect places hundreds of miles from their origin. Pollutants discharged into rivers and seas can be carried on currents to shores far and wide, or rest on the sea bed and cause untold damage to marine life. Industrial pollutants have even been found by scientists to be present in the air in Antarctica, and penguins have been found with large quantities of mercury in their bodies. There is quite literally no place on earth that is now completely free of pollution and the fact that we have not yet suffered more serious consequences of our inaction when it comes to pollution control, is only down to the miracle of nature. As Ghillean Prance points out, "We have got away with a lot because of nature's extraordinary capacity to act as a sink for unwanted products." So far, the wonder of the natural world has been able to largely cover for our mistakes and our arrogant ineptitude and greed. However, our good fortune may be coming to an end, as Prance adds, "Today, we have reached the limits of this natural sink."[23]

One of the most immediate consequences of reaching the limits of this "natural sink" may be to increase still further the rate at which animal and plant species

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[22] Cawardine, *op. cit.*, 1990: 24. Prance points out that the estimated cost of acid rain to Europe alone is some 118 million cubic metres of wood, worth £16 billion annually, and asks the question as to whether this money would not be better invested in pollution control. Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 44.

[23] Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 45.

are becoming extinct throughout the planet. Species extinction is, of course, a natural phenomenon that has always occurred and indeed is a necessary part of the evolutionary process. Throughout the millennia since the evolution of the first forms of life on the earth, countless numbers of species have come and gone; some have evolved into other species, the rest have disappeared altogether. What has changed in recent times, however, is the rate at which species are becoming extinct. For thousands of years the rate stood at around one species of plant or animal becoming extinct per one hundred years. Now the rate is widely believed to be nearer one thousand species every year[24] and other estimates put it as high as around ten thousand times naturally occurring extinction rates.[25] The true figure is probably somewhere in between.

The main impact of this kind of species loss is upon the biodiversity of the earth, as species are now becoming extinct at a far quicker rate than they can be replaced. Biodiversity is a term that includes not only the diversity of species of living organisms on the planet, but also the genes or genetic information they contain and even the complex ecosystems in which they live. It has taken around four billion years of evolution to achieve the current biodiversity seen on earth, which it is estimated includes somewhere between five to fifty million different species; although only one and a half million of these have so far been classified.[26]

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[24] Cawardine, *op. cit.*, 1990: 82.
[25] Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 47.
[26] *ibid.*, 45.

Biodiversity is vital to the well-being of the earth and all life upon it. Each species interacts with others to form the ecosystems of the world and our atmosphere and climate depend upon these complicated interrelationships of living organisms. Whole systems can break down when certain species are removed. As Ghillean Prance states, "Without forests and the organisms in the oceans, the life support system (of the planet) will break down."[27] Nevertheless, we continue with large-scale deforestation and the pumping of pollution into our seas.

Furthermore, modern agriculture has tended to move away from using a wide variety of crops and towards the use of a few high yield species. With the spread of genetically modified crops such a trend is increasing. However, these new crops are often not self-seeding and their use is threatening the future existence of the natural varieties, from which seed can be gathered for the next year's crop.[28] This further reduces the biodiversity of the planet and limits our options in the context of agriculture.

But perhaps one of the saddest consequences of our destruction of the biodiversity of our world is the fact that we are quite simply taking away some of the beauty and variety of our home and so making it a less enjoyable place to be. Each time a species disappears forever, not only are the future options for biodiversity lessened but also the wonder of our planet is diminished.

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[27] *ibid.*, 45.

[28] Also tied up in this are issues of justice particularly in relation to poor farmers, who often rely on gathering seed for the next year and cannot afford to pay out for new seed each season.

In addition, such a policy has an increasing effect because as the planet becomes less attractive, less various, it also becomes less awe inspiring, and finally less likely to promote within us a desire to care for the natural world of which we are a part. From the standpoint of an ecological spirituality in particular, this would be of considerable concern as it could herald a downward spiral of environmental destruction and, at the same time, progressively remove any incentive to redress the situation.

Already the beginning of that downward spiral can be clearly glimpsed through the work of people like Ghillean Prance, who himself admits:

> It is almost too late.....If we continue at the present extinction rate of between 4-6,000 species a year, by the year 2030 there will be between 116,000 and 250,000 less species to hold our biosphere together or for us to use or even just enjoy.[29]

While others, like Adrian Hough, believe that the loss of a sense of awe is already a contributory factor in the current crisis. Hough writes:

> Part of the problem would appear to be a consequence of the loss of the human sense of awe. All too often we fail to grasp the splendour of the surroundings in which we live, dismissing them in a few seconds before moving on to the next view.....We treat the World as a photograph album of two dimensional images to be opened and shut at will.[30]

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[29] Prance, *op. cit.*, 1996: 48.
[30] Adrian Michael Hough, *God is not 'Green': A Re-examination of Eco-theology*, Leominster: Gracewing, 1997: 30.

The environmental problems that face us in this new millennium are, therefore, not only about science and technology; although as seen above both are intimately involved in the situation and both will be called upon in efforts to solve the crisis. And there can be no doubt that such an ecological crisis exists, even from the brief details I have given in this chapter.

Furthermore, this is not entirely a political, sociological or economic crisis; although again all of these areas impinge on the environment. Certainly no solution to any matter of ecological concern can come about unless the political will is there, and any such solution is likely to have some impact on society and the way those in the richer nations live. Also, given that many of the environmental issues are tied up with issues surrounding the present imbalance between rich and poor in our world, economics will inevitably be connected to any necessary or desirable changes.

It is the connection between many of the environmental concerns and issues of justice and peace on a world and local scale, that means the crisis we face, and the solutions to it, must in addition have at the very least a moral/ethical dimension. This dimension will be concerned with such issues as the present injustices of world trade, of land taken from the poor to be used for cash crops; and it will question the morality of over-consumption by the rich and so on. In any thinking that takes seriously the ecological aspect, this moral questioning should extend to such areas as, for example, the use of non-renewable forms of fuel, intensive

farming methods, the clearing of rainforests and the concreting over of arable land, and the implications of genetic engineering.

Many of the issues raised by such questioning will impinge greatly on the very way of life that many people take for granted. Perhaps this will cause fear, uncertainty, even confusion about the future, about how we live and how we should live, about the place of humanity within the complexity of living organisms on earth, about our relationships with one another and with non-human nature and about our relationship with the divine. The problems are so immense and the required changes in the direction and lifestyles of so many people so great, that any lasting solutions will affect people at the deepest level. More than that, if such solutions are to be a success and humanity is to live sustainably in the world, then there needs to be a change of heart within people so that they support and even welcome the necessary changes.

In other words, there is underlying all the above a spiritual dimension to this environmental crisis. Indeed, I will argue in this thesis that there has to be a spiritual dimension, for without it all the technological fixes humanity can devise will not ultimately save us from the continued destruction of our habitat. Only a fundamental change of heart on the part of large sections of the human race can achieve that salvation.

This environmental crisis and its implications, therefore, form the context within which the rest of this work is set, and within which the spirituality and ecology discussed in this thesis are located. For it is also my contention that a truly

ecological Christian spirituality can contribute to the change of heart that is required, and thus contribute to the will to find and carry through any solutions to the situation we currently face. So it is to the definition of Christian spirituality that I now turn.

1.2: Defining Christian Spirituality

Before going on to consider the definition of this term, however, it is necessary to first explain why I have chosen to talk of Christian *spirituality* rather than Christian *theology*. The reason has to do precisely with the fact that I am also looking at ecology with particular reference to the impact of humanity upon the environment. As has been shown in the previous section, that impact has been and continues to be one that is detrimental to nature in many ways. Therefore, the one thing that is vital to the future of our environment and the ecology of our planet is what Rosemary Radford Ruether calls a *metanoia* on the part of human beings with regard to the natural world. Ruether describes this *metanoia* as being a "conversion of our spirit and culture, of our technology and social relations, so that the human species exists within nature in a life-sustaining way."[31] That being the case, it is obvious that what is needed is more than mere words. Rather the situation demands a completely new way of living and being human in the world, particularly for those in the industrialized North who have the greatest impact on the environment.

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[31] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*, London: SCM, 1993: 86.

In effect, what is required is a new vision of the place of humanity within the entirety of interrelationships that make up the whole of life on this planet, coupled with a deep felt desire to live that vision. This *metanoia* would, therefore, lie more naturally within the realms of spirituality than theology. Peter King cites Von Hugel's distinction between *theoria* and *theologia* and states that: "The first is the vision itself (the spirituality), the second the words with which that vision is described and communicated (theology)."[32] Theology is the words, whereas spirituality is the vision, seen and lived. Theology, at least as it has historically developed, is an abstract, rationalistic system, which can be divorced from people's lived experience. Whereas spirituality is embedded in that lived experience and arises out of it. Alister McGrath, in his book called simply *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*, states the following about spirituality:

> It is about that which animates the life of believers, and urges them on to deepen and perfect what has at present only been begun.
>
> Spirituality is the outworking in real life of a person's religious faith – what a person *does* with what they believe. It is not just about ideas.... It is about the way in which.....life is conceived and lived out.[33]

However, McGrath goes on to argue that the tension and distinction between theology and spirituality is to a large extent a recent one, arising out of western thought in the last two centuries. He claims that: "Properly understood, theology embraces, informs and sustains spirituality", and that theology "has suffered a

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[32] King, *op. cit.*, 1992: 6.
[33] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999:2.

serious and detrimental shift in meaning" as a result of "cultural assumptions, especially within the western academy, which have forced theology to see itself as an academically-neutral subject."[34] McGrath continues:

> Theology, in this classic sense of the term, is.....something which affects the heart and the mind. It relates to both....the objective content of faith, and the subjective act of trusting. But all this has changed, not on account of any fundamental difficulties with this classic conception of theology, but on account of the increasing professionalization and specialization of theological educators. The study of theology has become little more than the mastery of discrete bodies of data. It has (become) something you simply know about.....[35]

Whether or not McGrath's analysis is correct, there does nevertheless appear to be this distinction now between these two terms. Hence, for the purposes of this study which concerns the way we live and what motivates us to live in a particular way, I have decided to reject the term *theology* in favour of the more experiential term *spirituality*.

Defining Christian spirituality is, of course, no easy task. The word *spirituality* in itself has a myriad of different meanings and expressions across cultures and religions. Even adding the title *Christian* does not guarantee a uniform definition. Indeed, as shall become evident throughout this work, Christian spirituality exists

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[34] *ibid.*, 27.
[35] *ibid.*, 28.

in many variations. Nevertheless, it is necessary at this stage to at least gain some kind of picture of the phenomenon, albeit on a broad canvas.

It is perhaps important to note that, in the past, there has been a tendency in some Christian thinking to put all things spiritual, including our spirituality, into a separate compartment, as if that aspect of our lives was completely divorced from everything else that we do or say, indeed from all else that makes us human. It is probable that this tendency has grown out of the dualistic way of thinking, which sees the dualism of spirit/body as not only identifying the two as separate entities, but also as meaning the superiority of the spiritual over the physical or material.

Such a definition of spirituality is hinted at, for example, in the 1972 edition of *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, where *spirituality* is described as "the quality or condition of being spiritual: attachment to or regard for things of the spirit as opposed to material or worldly interests".[36] Whilst a dictionary definition must obviously be as precise as possible, this kind of description can easily give the impression that spirituality concerns only one part of our lives and is essentially about other-worldly interests. And certainly, even today, there are those within the Christian churches who would wish to subscribe to such a definition of spirituality. It is not, however, a useful definition for the purposes of this thesis, nor is it representative of a vast amount of Christian thought over the centuries and to the present day.

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[36] *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, ed. A. M. MacDonald, Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers Ltd, 1972: 1303.

The writers of the New Testament were quite clear that spirituality concerns the whole of life, including how we live, how we relate to others, and even how we use our bodies. The examples of this are far too numerous to list in full here, so three short extracts must suffice, all taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible:

> How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? Little children, let us love, not in word and speech, but in truth and action. (1 John 3:17-18)

> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?.....If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)

> .....do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God.....therefore, glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Each of these examples, which will have been influenced in some way by each writer's experience and understanding of Jesus Christ, illustrate a strong link between that which is within, that which we may wish to call spiritual, and our whole existence in this world.

This link between the spiritual and the life of the individual is also emphasized in the writings of many of the medieval and early modern Christian mystics. For example, St Teresa of Avila, in her work *The Interior Castle* written in 1577, states that the whole point and purpose of the spiritual journey is "the birth always of good works, good works" (VII 4.6). She writes:

> I repeat, it is necessary that your foundation consist of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practise them, you will always be dwarfs. (VII 4.9)

Teresa uses the biblical example of Mary and Martha from the gospel of Luke (10:38-42) to illustrate what she means by this. For her, Mary, who sits at the feet of Jesus, represents what is deeply spiritual within us; whilst Martha, who is distracted by her many tasks, is the part of us that is involved in all the events and trials of everyday living and service in the world. Teresa remarks:

> Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord.....How would Mary, always seated at his feet, provide him with food if her sister did not help her? (VII 4.12)[37]

The spiritual must be a part of the practical or physical, and vice versa. The spiritual cannot, therefore, be taken in isolation but must inform the way we live and be a part of the whole of life including how we relate to others and our surroundings.

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[37] All quotations taken from *The Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila*, vol.2, translated by K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez, Washington: I.C.S. Publications, 1980.

In more modern definitions of Christian spirituality the same is true. In the late 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church described it thus:

> The spiritual life is the Christian life lived with some intensity. It is the serious response of man (*sic*) to the revelation of God's love in Christ and consists in loving knowledge and service of God and one's fellow men (*sic*) in the Mystical Body of Christ. It manifests itself in the expression and the development of the love of God in prayer and action.[38]

A more contemporary definition states that Christian spirituality is "concerned with the conjunction of theology, prayer, and practical Christianity".[39] It is interesting that this definition includes theology as a part of what makes up Christian spirituality, which only reinforces the earlier argument that theology is now a narrower, more specific term. However, what is more important is that, once again, spirituality is not seen as simply an internal affair, but is also to do with our outward relationships. Alister McGrath reinforces this point with the following definition of Christian spirituality:

> Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith.[40]

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[38] *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Larkin, 1967:598.
[39] P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, London: SPCK, 1991:52.
[40] McGrath, *op. cit.*, 1999:2

A far broader definition of spirituality is given by Ursula King in *The Spirit of One Earth*:

> Spirituality has also been described as "an exploration into what is involved in becoming human" or as "an attempt to grow in sensitivity to self, to others, to non-human creation and to God who is within and beyond this totality". Thus understood, spirituality is linked to the experience of freedom, creativity, commitment, and value.....The whole of life can be seen as being related to spiritual practice.[41]

Whilst it is true that this definition makes no particular claim to being Christian, it is nevertheless this sort of wider definition that is most useful in the context of this thesis. This is because it is the only one of the above descriptions that specifically extends the scope of spirituality to go beyond our purely human relationships and include our relationship with the non-human creation. Yet it is precisely this kind of broadening of our spiritual understanding that is necessary within Christianity itself if the eventual aim of this work, a truly ecological Christian spirituality, is to be realised.

Up until now, however, there has been little evidence to suggest that those who define Christian spirituality have taken on board the need for this wider definition in the light of the urgent environmental issues that face us. One exception to this general trend can be found in a work by William Stringfellow, *The Politics of*

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[41] Ursula King, *The Spirit of One Earth*, New York: Paragon House, 1989:2, quoting "The Scottish Churches Council Working Party Report on 'Spirituality'", Dunblane: Scottish Churches House, 1977: 3.

Spirituality, which was published as early as 1984. In relation to what he calls "biblical spirituality", Stringfellow states:

> Whatever else may be affirmed about a spirituality which has a biblical precedent and style, spiritual maturity or spiritual fulfilment necessarily involves the *whole* person – body, mind and soul, place, relationships – in connection with the whole of creation throughout the era of time. Biblical spirituality encompasses the whole person in the totality of existence in the world, not some fragment or scrap or incident of a person.[42]

A truly ecological Christian spirituality similarly needs to involve the whole person in connection with the whole of creation. Indeed, such a spirituality needs to take seriously our interconnectedness with every part of that creation and not see the human and human relationships as somehow separate from the non-human, as previous Christian spiritualities appear to have done. Only then will it be wide enough to encompass all the interrelationships involved in living as part of nature on this planet, rather than apart from nature. Once our place as an integral part of the natural world is restored, then the environmental becomes part of the spiritual and vice versa, and the foundation for a truly ecological spirituality is laid.

It is too early in the present work to attempt an actual definition of such an ecological Christian spirituality, although it remains a part of the object of the

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[42] William Stringfellow, *The Politics of Spirituality*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984:22. As quoted in McGrath, *op. cit.*, 1999:4.

thesis to eventually do so. For now it is only necessary to state the intention and to move on to look at definitions of ecology.

1.3: Defining Ecology

The term *ecology* was first coined by the biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866 and is, therefore, a reasonably late addition to the English language. However, the idea of ecology preceded the term by around two to three hundred years. The word *ecology* has as its root the Greek term *oikos*, meaning *home*. Another word which has the same root is *economics*, and the term *oeconomy* was first linked to the natural world by the naturalist Sir Kenelm Digby as far back as 1658. This link was further cemented into place in 1749, when Carl von Linne published his book *The Oeconomy of Nature*.

However, it was the work of Charles Darwin that did much to really establish the science of ecology as a discipline in its own right. His voyage on HMS Beagle between the years of 1831-36 and his subsequent work on the theory of evolution were probably among the most essential ingredients in the creation of ecology as a science. The resulting book, *The Origin of Species*, was published at around the same time as Haeckel's own work on ecology.

Perhaps the most significant contribution Darwin's work made to the new science was in the ethical/moral field. As long as it was widely believed that human beings enjoyed "a special creation" (i.e. the notion that human beings were created separately from and superior to all non-human life and were uniquely "in

the image of God"), then science could treat non-human nature as purely objective *stuff* to be experimented with and exploited at will. However, if Darwin was correct, and human beings had evolved out of this same stuff, and indeed were related to other species and closely related to the apes, then such separateness disappears at a stroke. If other animals were, in Darwin's own words, "our fellow brethren"[43], then surely there had to be a moral or ethical dimension to our treatment of them. Based on such an idea, the new science of ecology could never treat non-human life as only an object for human use and abuse. Therefore it was immediately marked out as different in kind from the forms of science that had preceded it.

Running alongside the work of Darwin and Haeckel was the research done by Sir George Mirvart. Mirvart himself used the word *hexicology*, but its meaning was essentially the same as Haeckel's term and before very long it fell out of use. What was important for the emerging science of ecology, was that the work produced by Mirvart also confirmed the ethical dimension, and commented on the practical consequences of ignoring it:

> Let a new land be discovered with peculiar fauna and flora full of scientific interest, and straightaway the European introduces his thistles, his sparrows, his rabbits or his goats, and the harmonious balance which has resulted from the organic interplay of ages is at

[43] The naturalist John Muir (1838-1914) used a similar term, "our horizontal brothers", to describe non-human animals: " "Heaven bless you all," he wrote in his journal from the Sierras, meaning all of California's citizenry, including its lizards, grasshoppers, ants, bighorn sheep, grizzly bears, bluebottle flies..... "our horizontal brothers", as he was apt to describe the animal kingdom." (Edward Hogland writing in *American Characters: Selections from the National Portrait Gallery, Accompanied by Literary Portraits*, eds. R.W.B. Lewis & Nancy Lewis, Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1999:142.

> once destroyed. Downright evil is often the result. Forests are recklessly felled, and arid rainless wastes or dismal fever-laden swamps ensue.[44]

And so the science of ecology began to be established; a new science which had at its heart an extra dimension, that of the ethical/moral. This ethical and moral dimension meant that ecology not only challenged some of the presuppositions of previous science, but as the quotation highlights, it also challenged many of the preconceptions of colonialism. Indeed, ecology illustrated that colonialism was closely linked to much of the environmental damage that was occurring in the world, and that European expansion and greed was largely to blame for that damage. Since the demise of colonialism in the second half of the twentieth century, that critique provided by ecology has gone on to challenge the excesses of capitalism for the same reasons.

Consequently, since the work of Haeckel and in response to a changing world within which different ethical and moral questions have arisen, ecology has been adapted and the meaning and understanding of ecology has widened. In our present day, there are several types of ecology, each one of which has arisen out of a certain background and in response to certain circumstances and, therefore, each one differs in some way from the others and has its own distinctive emphases. The most commonly mentioned of these expressions of ecology will be looked at in turn, in order to gain an idea of the variation that currently exists

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[44] As quoted in Derek Wall, *Green History: a reader in environmental literature, philosophy, and politics*, London: Routledge, 1994:5-6.

within the term. The first of these is the one Haeckel himself would probably have been most concerned with, the notion of scientific ecology.

1.3.1: *Scientific Ecology*

Put at its simplest, scientific ecology is "the study of the relationship among organisms and the environments in which they live, including all living and non-living components".[45] Anne Primavesi explains this concept in more detail and introduces the word *home* which, as mentioned above, is the root of ecology. Primavesi states that ecology is:

> .....the study of organisms in their environments or "homes"..... Traditionally one organism and its "home" environment have been studied together as an ecosystem, on the implicit understanding that any one such system is not in fact isolated from those surrounding it but that they interconnect within the greater whole.....ultimately all the ecosystems of the planet interconnect in the living whole we call Earth.[46]

Here we have one of the basic and most important lessons of scientific ecology; namely, that all life is ultimately interconnected and that all that is living is interconnected with all that is non-living. In other words, everything is interconnected in some way. Each organism is part of a larger ecosystem. An *ecosystem* is described as "an integrated unit consisting of the community of

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[45] *The Hutchinson Concise Encyclopedia*, London: BCA, 1994:301.
[46] Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1991:7.

living organisms and the non-living, or physical, environment in a particular area".[47] Therefore, each organism is interconnected with all the living and non-living parts of its "home". Furthermore, each ecosystem is interconnected with those that surround it and so on, until all are ultimately connected within the whole. The image of a web is one that has come to symbolise this interconnectedness, and it is a symbol that is frequently used in environmental and ecological writings.

Much work has been done on these interrelationships by the scientist James Lovelock, whose "Gaia hypothesis" sees the whole of planet Earth as a living organism.[48] Lovelock uses as evidence for his hypothesis the apparently self-regulatory systems of the planet, particularly with regard to atmosphere and temperature. The weakness of Lovelock's work is that it is only an hypothesis, and one that is disputed by other scientists. Nevertheless there is other evidence for "the web of life", not least that provided by Johann Galtung, whose illustrations of "feedback loops" show clearly the interconnections between all forms of life on Earth.[49] The American Naturalist, John Muir, who founded the environmentalist body the "Sierra Club", summed up this interconnectedness with the words: "when you try to pick anything out by itself, you find it hitched to the universe".[50]

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[47] *The Hutchinson Concise Encyclopedia*, London: BCA, 1994:301.
[48] See, for example, James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia*, Oxford University Press, 1988.
[49] See Johann Galtung, *Environment, Devlopment, and Military Activity*, Oslo: Universitetforlaget, 1982.
[50] Quoted in Tim Cooper, *Green Christianity*, London: Spire, 1990:10

Another equally important lesson to come out of the insights of scientific ecology is the fact that, not only are all things interrelated, but these relationships are fragile, complex, and often finely balanced. The removal of any one organism from an ecosystem can therefore have potentially disastrous consequences for the whole ecosystem, as well as a "knock-on" effect on the surrounding ecosystems. In the words of Rosemary Ruether, ecology "examines how these natural communities function to sustain a healthy web of life and how they become disrupted, causing death to animal and plant life".[51]

Scientific ecology, then, gives a firm basis to the belief of many environmentally-concerned people that all life on Earth is ultimately interconnected, and that to damage one part is effectively to damage the whole. However, how such information is used differs within the scientific community. Derek Wall notes that there are two traditions within the science of ecology, the "Arcadian" and the "Imperialist":

> The Imperialist ecologist uses the subject to discover better ways of "managing" nature for human benefit, the Arcadian advocates the "deep ecology" approach of giving non-human life independent ethical status. The Imperialist seeks to exploit, the Arcadian to live in harmony.[52]

As will become clear later in this thesis, these two traditions are evident in more than just scientific ecology. Indeed, it could be argued that the Imperialist

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[51] Ruether, *op. cit.*, 1993:1.
[52] Wall, *op. cit.*, 1994:6.

tradition identified by Wall is representative of the traditional approach of Christianity to the environment, where humanity has been seen as divinely appointed over and above non-human life; whilst the Arcadian tradition is more representative of the alternative Christian approach which this present enquiry seeks to develop.

1.3.2: *Social Ecology*:

For many people, the definition of ecology as the study of living organisms in relation to their environment is inadequate, particularly when looking at the relationship between human beings and the world they inhabit. We human beings are complex social animals and much of our behaviour is not purely individual but is linked to the social institutions of which we are a part. The impact we have on the environment is often, therefore, also linked to the impact of the particular society, institution, or even nation that we are a part of. For example, as an individual I may not cut down rainforests, but I may belong to a nation that sanctions and supports the trade in tropical hardwoods. It is then not necessarily my individual actions that cause deforestation (unless, of course, I buy furniture made from those same hardwoods), and so a study of my impact alone on the environment may not include consideration of the damage to rainforests. However, I am still involved in that destruction as part of the nation concerned.

It is common, therefore, to see the definition of ecology broadened out to include the study of institutions in relation to their environments. Social ecology uses this

broader understanding of the term.[53] It looks at ecology from the particular perspective of human activity and societies, studying what kind of impact these have had and are having on the ecosystems that make up our world:

> ....ecology, in the expanded sense of a combined socioeconomic and biological science, emerged in the last several decades to examine how human misuse of "nature" is causing pollution of soils, water, and air, and the destruction of the plant and animal communities, thereby threatening the base of life upon which the human species itself depends.[54]

However, social ecologists would not simply put this destruction down to the "collective guilt" of the human species. Through their studies concerning the political and social institutions of the world, they argue that some sections of humanity are more guilty than others in this regard. For example, it would be wrong to apportion the same blame for the destruction of the rainforests on an indigenous Amazonian Indian tribe as on an international logging company and its political backers. Social ecologists claim, therefore, that it is necessary to recognize "the impact of different nations, classes, and sexes on the planet".[55] Consequently, the solution to the environmental crisis, as far as social ecologists are concerned, must come about through social and political means, and particularly through social and political change on the part of the countries and institutions that cause the most ecological damage.

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[53] See, for example, Paul Ehrlich, *et al.*, *Human Ecology: Problems and Solutions*, San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1973.
[54] Ruether, *op. cit.*, 1993:1-2.
[55] Peter Marshall, *Nature's Web: an exploration of ecological thinking*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1992:424-5.

1.3.3: *Shallow Ecology*:

Shallow ecology is effectively that which would fit in with the world view of the "Imperialist" ecological scientist as described above. It is also, arguably, the ecological view shared by the majority of people in the industrialized North:

> In shallow ecology, human beings are put above nature or outside nature.....this perspective goes with the domination of nature. Value is seen as residing in human beings, nature is given merely use value, or instrumental value.[56]

Such an outlook goes hand in hand with the notion that non-human nature is merely "stuff" for humanity to use at will and exploit for our own wants and needs. It is therefore popular with those who make large profits out of that kind of exploitation, as well as with those who promote a highly materialist/capitalist way of life.

Furthermore, shallow ecology supports the creation accounts in Genesis as they have been traditionally interpreted, with human beings given dominion by God over every other form of life. Consequently, this is probably the most prominent type of ecology promoted among Christians, particularly in the developed nations. Shallow ecology has led to many Christian environmentalist thinkers advocating the "stewardship approach" to the natural world. This approach, which attempts to soften the dominion of humanity slightly by seeing human beings as having

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[56] Fritjof Capra, *Belonging to the Universe*, London: Penguin Books, 1992:85.

been given the role of stewards over creation by God, will be the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.

Shallow ecology probably has its name because of its superficial nature. It is on the surface concerned with ecology and the environmental problems we face, but it is not deeply concerned *by* the environmental impact of human activity and the destruction caused to the natural world as a result of human domination of the planet. It is, therefore, a comfortable ecology, because it does nothing to challenge the way of life those in the richer nations of the world have come to take for granted.

1.3.4: *Deep Ecology*:

In direct contrast to shallow ecology, deep ecology stresses not the separateness of humanity, but rather the interconnectedness of the human with all non-human life and the whole of creation. Deep ecology therefore embraces "the central insight of ecology that there is an intermingling of all parts of the universe". Following on from this insight is the belief of deep ecologists that "all life forms have the equal right to live and fulfil their potential". This leads deep ecology "beyond the so-called factual scientific level to the level of Earth wisdom".[57] As a result, deep ecology is perhaps the most inherently spiritual of the various forms of ecology.

[57] Marshall, *op. cit.*, 1992:413-4.

Within the writings of the deep ecologists, one does not have to look far to find references to the spiritual. One of the "ultimate intuitions" of deep ecology is the notion of "self-realization", which can be understood in a very individualistic way, but which in deep ecology means "a form of spiritual unfolding which goes beyond the human to embrace the non-human world". This occurs when "one experiences oneself to be a genuine part of all life.....going from an alienated, atomized, homeless existence to become part of the ecological and cosmic whole, to be at one with all things".[58]

Furthermore, because human beings are no longer seen as separate from nature, they can also no longer be regarded as *above* or *beyond* the rest of the natural world. Therefore, there can be no place in deep ecology for hierarchies of being (whether these are divinely sanctioned or not), nor for thinking of the non-human creation as simply an object of no value for human use and exploitation. Anne Primavesi states that deep ecology "may be defined as *a consistent refusal to fragment the world into separate parts*". Instead it sees the world "as a non-hierarchical system containing diverse and cooperating equalities".[59] This "biocentric equality", as it is sometimes termed, then guides the way in which people live their lives; it becomes in effect a "moral principle", the practical implication of which "is that we should live with minimum impact of other species and on earth".[60]

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[58] *ibid.*, 414-5.
[59] Primavesi, *op. cit.*, 1991:7.
[60] Marshall, *op. cit.*, 1992:415.

Here, then, in deep ecology, is maybe the key towards effecting the kind of *metanoia* necessary to avoid the worst consequences of our present destructive relationship with the rest of nature. Perhaps here, in the spirituality engendered by the insights of deep ecology, is the key to a truly ecological Christian spirituality. Perhaps so, but ironically deep ecology has a distrust of Christian theology and "particularly sees Western culture, sanctified in Christianity, as a major cause of this destructive culture".[61]

1.3.5: *Christian Ecology*:

Definitions of Christian ecology appear to be very few and far between. Perhaps the reason for this is due to the fact that Christianity and Christian thinkers have, at least until very recently, rarely addressed the issue of ecology. Even now, when environmental questions are discussed by theologians, there is usually a separation between those questions and the term Christianity. It is almost as if environmental problems are not Christian problems, although Christians may of course consider or discuss them. For example, one may quite often read questions like, "How should Christians understand our relationship to the natural world?" or, "What is the Christian's responsibility towards the environment?"; but it is only very occasionally that one may come across questions like, "What is Christian environmentalism?", or even, "How do we understand Christian ecology?"

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[61] Cooper, *op. cit.*, 1990:112.

However, a few writers do use the term Christian ecology and provide a definition for it. One such definition is this: "an exploration of how the structure and function of nature fit into God's purpose".[62] The problem with this kind of definition is that not only is it somewhat vague, but it also relies on the assumption that we know what God's purpose is. In addition, it appears to be the study of nature as separate from humanity, which would imply that the study of humanity as separate from nature is also part of the equation.

Perhaps a better definition would be that given by C. Merchant in the book "Radical Ecology":

> Christian ecology sees a responsibility to reinterpret the mandate of Genesis 1: 28 to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" as the responsibility to give back to the land whatever is taken from it. This means that the nonrenewable metals should be recycled, that trees should be replanted, and that soil should be conserved. Dominion over the land means that a responsible Christian will care for the land with vision, mercy, benevolence, and compassion.[63]

This is at least a more detailed definition. It is, however, one that leads on to the notion of stewardship, as Merchant goes on to say, "Stewardship means that humans have a responsibility to take care of the earth and to insure that all its

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[62] *ibid.*, 10.

[63] C. Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, London: Routledge, 1992:123. This definition comes in a chapter headed "Spiritual Ecology" and covers ecological thinking from Earth religions, Ancient Indian religions, Eastern religions and so on. As this thesis is specifically about the Christian religion, space does not allow a full exploration of "Spiritual Ecology" here, which is why there is no such section in this chapter. However, some exploration of the ecology of other religions will be included in a later chapter.

beings function together in an integrated way."[64] This raises other problems for the ecology of our planet which will be looked at in the next chapter.

1.4: Conclusion

It can be seen, therefore, that both Christian spirituality and ecology have various definitions and neither can be summed up in one single phrase. However, there are things which can be said about both as they relate to this particular work.

In the case of Christian spirituality, any narrow definition that sees the spiritual as a separate compartment of this life, or as an other-worldly dimension, obviously has no part to play in an ecological spirituality, which must be rooted in the whole of human experience. Similarly, any spirituality which sees the human as separate from the rest of creation can have no place, as ecology demands the recognition of the interrelatedness of all things, human and non-human, even living and non-living. The widest and most all-embracing definition of spirituality must therefore be used, and explored with reference to the Christian faith.

The same must also be true of the definition of ecology that is used. Shallow ecology is too restrictive and once again does not take seriously enough the interrelation of all that is. Scientific ecology has its place in that it teaches us about the interconnected nature of the universe, but it too is ultimately not enough on its own because there is a need to go beyond - deeper than - the purely

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[64] *ibid.*, 123.

scientific. Only by doing so can there be any real hope of a change of heart as well as a change of mind on the part of a large enough number of people.

There are encouraging signs that this is something that is being increasingly recognised and acknowledged, even by many scientists themselves. Indeed, the 1993 Population Summit of 58 of the world's leading Scientific Academies, stated that:

> .....it is not prudent to rely on science and technology alone to solve the problems created by rapid population growth, wasteful resource consumption and poverty. Scientists, engineers, health professionals should study and provide advice on: cultural, social, economic, religious, educational and political factors that affect reproductive behaviour, family size, and successful family planning.[65]

In all of the areas of environmental stress and degradation illustrated in the first part of this chapter, the reasons for the ecological problems identified cannot be solved merely by science and technological fixes alone. Something deeper and more lasting is needed, something that involves a different way of envisioning the relationships of earth, and particularly the relationship between humanity and the rest of the natural world. This new way of thinking will inevitably have to involve new ethics and perhaps a renewed reverence for the whole of creation to help to establish sustainable patterns of life for us as human beings.

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[65] U.S. National Academy, *Population Summit of the World's Scientific Academies, New Delhi, India*, Washington: U.S. National Academy Press, 1993:13.

It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the world's religions will have a part to play in bringing about the changes that are necessary. And if so, then it is the contention of this thesis that they can only do so effectively within the framework of a truly ecological spirituality. Hence the search here for such a spirituality within the Christian religion.

Sally McFague states that: "Most simply, a Christian nature spirituality is Christian praxis (reflective practice) extended to the natural world".[66] Simple it may sound, but in fact it is far from simple to achieve because it requires a much wider understanding of Christian spirituality than has previously been the case, combined with the insights of a deep ecology that has for the most part rejected Christianity. Nevertheless, despite the apparent difficulties, such a combination is necessary if this thesis is to succeed in its aim of formulating a truly ecological Christian spirituality. However, the first task is to consider the steps that have already been taken to establish Christianity's green credentials by looking at the "stewardship approach".

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[66] Sally McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997: 9.

Chapter Two: The Stewardship Approach

2.1: The Evolution of the Approach

Although the notion of stewardship has only become linked with the environment in recent decades, it does in fact have a long history within the Christian churches. As far back as 1754, for example, John Wesley the founder of Methodism, wrote in his *Journal*:

> As to yourself, you are not the proprietor of anything; no, not of one shilling in the world. You are only a steward of what another entrusts you with, to be laid out, not according to your will, but his.[1]

Wesley was writing about personal possessions and indeed the whole ideology of private ownership. For him, the only "owner" of anything was God, the creator of everything. Therefore, the most we mere mortals could hope for was to be entrusted with a measure of that which God owned, to look after for a time as stewards on God's behalf. A little later, Wesley expanded these ideas in a pamphlet entitled "The Good Steward", in which he again wrote concerning the claim to private ownership:

> It is not so with the steward; he is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his Master pleases. He has no right to dispose of anything which is in his hands, but according to the will of his Lord.....Now, this is exactly the case of every man, with relation to God. We are not at liberty to use what he has lodged in our hands as

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, October 28th, 1754. As quoted in Theodore W. Jennings, *Good News to the Poor*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990: 100.

> we please, but as he pleases who alone is possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature.[2]

Nevertheless, despite such entreaties as this, the idea of human stewardship did not prove instantly popular even in Methodism, and certainly not within the churches as a whole. It was not until almost two hundred years later, that the notion made any real impact on Christianity, and then it was in a slightly different context. Rather than being used to criticise private ownership, as Wesley had originally intended, the emphasis was now more about how best to use the resources that churches and church members did own; and even about how to increase or maximise those resources with a particular emphasis on the financial.

Therefore, by the late 1960s, the word "stewardship" was already known in many churches but it was not yet associated with environmental concerns. Essentially it was to do with money, and more specifically with the raising of money for individual churches. If a church found itself running into financial difficulty, then one way it could ease the situation would be to adopt what was known as a "stewardship programme". This meant that all the financial outgoings would be scrutinized and cut back on where possible, whilst new ways of generating income would be explored. Sometimes the campaign was extended beyond the purely financial and used to assess the resources and talents of the individual churches as well; though still with the underlying intention of assessing where these could best be used to maximise their effectiveness and to generate financial income.

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[2] John Wesley, "The Good Steward". As quoted in Jennings, *op. cit.*, 1990: 101.

In many cases, these campaigns were quite successful, often managing to inject new life and resources into churches that would otherwise probably have continued to dwindle and eventually close. Because of this, "stewardship" came to be viewed in a generally positive light by church members and, indeed, stewardship programmes of this nature are still adopted by some churches today. As a result, for many Christians the word "stewardship" has, even now, more to do with taking care of finances than with the care of the environment.

Nevertheless, from around 1967 onwards, "stewardship" has, in Christian circles, become increasingly linked with a particular theological approach to the environmental problems facing humanity in the last years of the twentieth and early years of the twenty-first centuries. One catalyst in this process was the article, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" by Professor Lynn White Jnr., which appeared in *Science* magazine in the early part of 1967.[3] The impact of this short article on Christianity was probably greater than even White himself could possibly have anticipated.

The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, up to this point the churches had not really acknowledged the fact that there was an ecological crisis at all. Documents produced by the various mainstream denominations prior to the late 1960s make no reference to such a crisis. Indeed, there are virtually no explicitly ecological or environmental references in these documents, despite the fact that there was already mounting evidence of the harmful effects of industrialisation and

[3] *Science*, Vol. 155, No. 3767, 10th March 1967: 1203-7.

environmental degradation on the planet.[4] This lack of acknowledgement is made even more surprising when one realises that the churches were present in areas like the Amazon and were witnessing at first hand the devastating consequences of deforestation on the plant, animal, and human populations of such regions.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly from the point of view of the churches, White blamed western Christianity for creating the kind of world-view which has resulted in the destructive domination of nature by humans. White claims that, for about the last seventeen hundred years, we have lived "very largely in a context of Christian axioms" and, therefore, our present-day attitudes to the natural world must owe something to the Christian view of creation.[5]

This Christian world-view stems from the creation stories that Christianity inherited from Judaism, and has at its centre the notion of human domination over the rest of life, as set out in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. Christianity is thus "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man (*sic*) and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."

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[4] As early as 1952, for example, the Sahara University Expedition, headed by Richard St Barbe Baker, presented evidence to show that the removal of tree cover undermined human existence. Later, in his book *Sahara Conquest* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), Baker wrote: "We all have a duty not only to our fellow men but to all living creatures.....Our first aim must be devoted service to all with no tinge of exploitation." (p.168) and claimed that the "Golden Age" would be reached "when Mankind realises his one-ness with his brother and with his mother earth." (p.179).

[5] This view has been restated more recently by Adrian B. Smith in his work, *The God Shift: Our Changing Perception of the Ultimate Mystery*, (London: New Millenium, 1996), who states: "Today, despite Church leaders bemoaning the fact that Europe is no longer Christian, our Western culture is still fundamentally a Christian culture, formed by centuries of Christian influence and belief." (p.6).

Furthermore, by destroying pagan animism, Christianity effectively desacralized the natural world, thus making it possible "to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects". It is this that has led to the rise of the science and technology we see today which, when joined together, "to judge by many of the ecological effects, are out of control". Hence, White concludes that neither Christianity (in its present form), nor science and technology alone, can save us from ecological disaster; the former because of its "axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man (*sic*)", and the latter two because they "are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature".[6]

Given such a detailed historical attack as White's, the Christian churches felt that they had to establish their "green" credentials. This became an increasingly urgent task, as White's claims were backed up by others. For example, in 1973 the landscape architect Ian McHarg, in an essay entitled "The Place of Nature in the City of Man", asserted that the "historic Western anthropocentric-anthropomorphic tradition" had reduced nature to inconsequence. Citing particularly Judaism and Christianity, McHarg claimed that they "have long been concerned with justice and compassion for the acts of man to man, but have traditionally assumed nature to be a mere backdrop for the human play."[7]

A year later, further criticism came from British philosopher John Passmore who also criticised Christianity for being more concerned with another world (the next

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[6] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", as quoted in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, London: Routledge, 1996: 184-193.
[7] Ian L. McHarg, "The Place of Nature in the City of Man", *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian G. Barbour, Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1973: 175. As quoted in H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985: 1.

world) than with this one that we live our lives in. In addition, Passmore echoed Lynn White's claim that Christianity actually sanctioned human hostility toward nature and agreed that Christian theology could never address ecological issues and still be Christian.[8]

As a result of this continued criticism and the need to respond, a new theological perspective began to emerge; one that moved away from what had previously seemed a refusal on the part of theologians to see the environmental crisis as anything to do with Christianity. Effectively the churches were experiencing their own version of climate change, and in the new climate some theologians were at least prepared to take ecology seriously. The tool these theologians most commonly used was the notion of humanity as the steward of creation, hence the rise of the stewardship approach from a programme to improve the financial efficacy of churches to a proof of Christianity's genuine concern for the environment. Indeed, since the early 1970s, stewardship has been the most popular answer put forward by the churches in response to the charge that Christianity has nothing to say to the current ecological crisis. It is the image of humanity as stewards that has spearheaded Christianity's attempts to establish a green identity and an environmental credibility.

An early example of this is the work of Thomas Derr, whose book *Ecology and Human Need*, was written shortly after the criticisms of McHarg and Passmore. In this study, Derr develops a theology of "responsible stewardship" towards the environment, pointing out that:

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[8] John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, New York: Scribner, 1974. As cited in John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993:9.

> Man (*sic*) lives in the context of history and community and his decisions regarding nature must be responsible to that setting. He does not enjoy absolute right of disposal over natural resources, but is their steward, the caretaker of the Divine owner, using them and preserving their usefulness to future ages.[9]

In addition, the Anglican Church, in its report entitled "Faith in the Countryside", saw human beings as "stewards, custodians, companions, and priests" of the non-human world; perhaps taking a lead from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, where humanity is similarly seen as a kind of mediator between God and the cosmos.

Out of the dust of the criticism of Christianity, therefore, rose the steward and the stewardship approach as saviours of Christian environmental concern. As the approach became more widely accepted and used, so it began to develop certain characteristics that typified it and helped to establish its place in Christian thinking and theology.

2.2: Characteristics of the Stewardship Approach

> Lord God, we recognise you as our creator and the sustainer of the universe. So often we stand before the wonders of your universe in its various forms and are awe-struck at its greatness, its beauty, its harmony, and its power. And we marvel at the fact that you have given this to humans, as your stewards, to care for it. And we have to confess our stewardship has often been very poor and lacking in what it should be. We pray that you will be with us this morning, as we

[9] Thomas Sieger Derr, *Ecology and Human Need*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975: 7. As quoted in Santmire, *op. cit.*, 1985: 4.

> think about our responsibility as Christians for the environment, and that you will help us to see more fully how we can be better stewards of the good things you have given us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

This prayer was said at the start of a Christian day conference on the environment[10] and it typifies the stewardship approach to the ecological questions of today. That is also the nature of what follows in this section, which will be a description of the things that are "most characteristic" of the notion of Christian stewardship. The reason for this is that there is not one definitive approach, but many overlapping ones, and the range within the stewardship literature is too broad to be covered fully here. Therefore I have restricted myself to what I perceive to be the essence of stewardship theology and thinking; that is, to the things most proponents of the approach hold in common.

Central to all of these is a reinterpretation of the word "dominion" found in Genesis 1:28:

> God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth.[11]

In Christian tradition, this verse has often been taken to mean that human beings are destined to rule over the rest of life, and that they do so with God's blessing.

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[10] Prayer said at the start of a day conference entitled "Christian Responsibility and the Environment", held at Bristol University, on March 2nd 1996, arranged by Bristol School of Christian Studies.

[11] All biblical quotations are taken from The New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

Therefore, humanity has a divine right to do what it likes with nature. Under the stewardship approach, however, such an interpretation is seen as a distortion of the true meaning of the passage; a distortion which, it is claimed, probably came about as a result of the "Fall". "Dominion" should really be seen, according to the stewardship theologians, as indicating a caretaking or stewardship role for humanity, on behalf of God who is the creator, and thus the owner, of the universe including the earth. This reinterpretation gives humanity certain obligations of care for nature, which is only given in trust to us to look after, but which ultimately belongs to God. The emphasis on Divine ownership of the whole creation goes back at least as far as the words of John Wesley, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and probably much further. It illustrates that stewardship is the responsible and non-exploitative caretaking of God's world for God's purposes, rather than dominion over nature without justice.

To emphasise this point still further, the proponents of stewardship stress the importance of seeing Genesis 1:28 in the light of Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." The Christian monk David Steindl-Rast comments: "That's where the sense of responsibility comes in. Stewardship, rather than exploitative dominion, is the crux of that passage".[12] Of course, this is before the Fall and even before the creation of woman according to Genesis 2. With the Fall, this stewardship role becomes abused and it is then that it turns into exploitative domination. In addition, nature effectively becomes the enemy of humanity, as God says to Adam: "cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days

[12] David Steindl-Rast, *Belonging to the Universe*, London: Penguin Books, 1992: 91.

of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field." (Genesis 3:17-18). The call to stewardship is, therefore, a plea to rediscover humanity's pre-fallen relationship with nature. This is seen as part of the path towards "cosmic redemption". The whole physical universe is then part of the Fall-Redemption drama, rather than just humanity. In the words of Keith Innes: "The doctrine of creation may be seen as the framework within which the work of God in saving power can be understood."[13]

Also of great importance to stewardship theology is the fact that, in the Old Testament, the gift of the land is an essential part of God's covenant with Israel. Furthermore, possession of the land is dependent on faithfulness to the covenant. Attention to nature, therefore, becomes a part of the fear of God. The Law codes in Exodus and Leviticus reflect this in their provision for the protection and safeguarding of non-human creatures and the land itself. Exodus 23:10-11, for example, reads:

> For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard and with your orchard.

Under this law code, known as the principle of the fallow, the poor, the animals, and the land itself all profit from the command for stewardship.

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[13] Keith Innes, *Caring for the Earth*, Grove Ethical Studies, No.66, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1991: 11.

This has led some Christian environmentalists to add an eleventh commandment to the existing ten – "Thou shalt cherish and care for the earth and all within it".[14] Certainly, there is within stewardship the idea of a special relationship with nature because it is God's creation and gift to us, and no-one should destroy what God has created. In addition, as we are a part of that creation, we are members of the community of nature and are, in that sense at least, connected with the natural world and thus have further obligations towards it. However, there is a resistance against the view that humanity is just a part of nature. R.B. Fowler points out that some stewardship theologians argue that "any proper understanding of Christian stewardship necessarily implies that humans are different from the rest of creation". Human beings are "special creations of God" with "distinct stewardship responsibilities". Only such an understanding, they claim, can provide the necessary moral imperative of human care for the environment; anything less results in a "morally empty universe".[15]

Whilst the place of God is firmly fixed in this approach, the place of Jesus Christ is not so clear. Indeed, it has to be said that in some of the stewardship literature he simply does not appear. More often, however, stewardship thinkers invoke an image of Jesus as one who teaches stewardship himself. An example of this teaching is the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), in which the Master praises the servants who have doubled the number of the talents he entrusted them with during his absence. This is interpreted to mean that we should return the natural world to God in a better condition than that in which we received it. It is

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[14] R.B. Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought*, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1995: 77.
[15] *ibid.*, 78.

also pointed out by some that Jesus uses references to nature frequently in his ministry.

Others cite the Incarnation itself as an indicator of God's love for the creation. In the Incarnation, they claim, God entered the ecological process in person and so showed concern for the physical world. As evidence in support of such a claim, the words of John 3:17 are often quoted: "For God so loved the world...." not just humans. In other words, the world to which Christ came was not just that of humanity but it was the whole created universe. A Christian is then someone who is reconciled to the whole of creation through their belief in Christ, and should therefore utilize the natural world in a way that is in obedience to the command that God is the owner and we are but stewards. Furthermore, Christ's work of reconciliation does not stop with human beings, but continues until "all in heaven or on earth may be brought into a unity in Christ" (Ephesians 1:10).

Through beliefs and ideas like these, the stewardship approach calls for individual Christians and churches to change their attitudes to the natural world and to give the environment a more prominent place in their thinking and worship. As a result, some churches have begun to embrace the language of the stewardship approach in their worship and in new liturgies as well. The Methodist Worship Book which came out in 1999, for example, includes the following collect for inclusion in Harvest Thanksgiving services:

> Bountiful God,
> you entrust your creation to our care.
> Grant us grace so to order our common life

that we may use your gifts to your glory,
for the relief of those in need
and for our own well-being;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.[16]

In modern hymns, too, the notion of stewardship does make the occasional appearance. Perhaps the most explicit of these is a hymn written by Fred Pratt Green, the fourth verse of which reads:

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
Ours, as his stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
Good Lord, deliver us, world without end![17]

However, as yet the examples are few and far between and it would have to be said that Christian environmental concern has not caused a great outpouring of new worship material even given the general acceptance of the notion of stewardship.

However, in addition to including the environment in their worship, the approach does also call on Christians to change their way of life and live in a more environmentally-friendly way, by taking steps to do more recycling and so on. The success or otherwise of this call is impossible to gauge, as is any claim that Christians are recycling any more than any other group in our society. Nevertheless, at least there is a responsibility laid on Christians through the notion

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[16] *The Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999: 562.
[17] Fred Pratt Green, Stainer and Bell Ltd, as reprinted in *Hymns and Psalms*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1983.

of stewardship. That same responsibility is being put to churches who are being encouraged to make more environmentally-conscious decisions, like using recycled paper for their newsletters and notices, using low-wattage bulbs where possible, and leaving "wild" areas in their churchyards to encourage wildlife.

By engendering a feeling of responsibility for the ecology of the earth in its adherents, stewardship hopes to encourage them to take practical steps in their lives to help the environment. However, the question needs to be asked as to whether the approach goes far enough.

2.3: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Approach

The strengths of the stewardship approach stem from a recognition of the environmental problems facing this planet, and of human responsibility in causing them. Indeed, this recognition is itself a strength and a vast improvement on the position held in the churches before stewardship. Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that some human stewardship of nature and the earth has now become inevitable. The dramatic effects of human impact on the environment, along with our place as the currently dominant species and our abilities in the various fields of science, all point to the need for human stewardship to safeguard the ecology of this planet in the future. Keith Innes, in the ethical study *Caring for the Earth*, states:

> There is a sense in which the whole process of evolution now passes through us and depends on us. In view of the powers which human

> beings now have to control the future evolution and even survival of other species, this statement is no exaggeration.[18]

Innes wrote this several years before the recent "successes" with the cloning of farm animals like Dolly the sheep. The ability to clone or genetically engineer other species gives human beings even more control over the evolution of life on this planet. Furthermore, we cannot easily undo what has already been done. To some extent, then, stewardship is now inevitable, and the theological approach which goes under the same name obviously gains strength from this inevitability.

Nevertheless, even given such an inevitability, the theological approach is nonetheless not exempt from criticism. Stewardship may indeed be necessary to some extent or another, but the question must still be asked as to what type of stewardship is needed. As has already been illustrated, this approach stemmed originally from an extension of the financial stewardship programmes of some of the churches. There are those who claim that the theology of stewardship, even when applied to the environment, actually retains its financial overtones. Clare Palmer, in her essay "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics"[19], makes the claim that:

> One could almost compare the natural world to a giant all-embracing bank account, containing food, clothes, riches, medicines, companions, leisure facilities, landscapes, views, and climate

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[18] Innes, *op. cit.*, 1991: 20.
[19] Clare Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics", *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology*, eds. I. Ball, M. Goodall, C. Palmer, & J. Reader, London: SPCK, 1992: 67-86.

> regulators! We are here to look after it – but prudently, as we have it in trust. We must not destroy it by 'spending it all at once'.[20]

With the human capacity to get into debt, this is perhaps not the best model of stewardship to have. Add to that the fact of the environmental degradation that has been and to some extent still is being caused by the debt crisis that many countries of the South are enduring and the picture becomes even more ludicrous. This serves to illustrate that a particular weakness of stewardship is its practical nature, which makes it an option only for those who can afford it.

It also needs to be recognised, that human stewardship of the environment only remains inevitable as long as the other conditions mentioned above prevail. If humanity were to lose its status as the dominant species, or its ability to master the sciences, or were even to become extinct, then environmental management would immediately revert to other, more "primitive" controls. Nature would soon fill the gap left, for example, by the extinction of humanity.

All of which does lead on to a further strength of the stewardship approach, which is that, in some of its manifestations, it does at least admit the possibility of human extinction and the continuation of the earth without us. Philip Hodgson, for instance, sees the possibility of the human race increasing "without limit until all the resources of the earth are used up and it is extinguished by famine and disease".[21] A possibility such as this would be denied by traditional,

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[20] *ibid.*, 73. Notions like the idea that we should look after the rainforests because we do not know what hidden reserves of medicines are yet to be found, often put forward by conservationists and stewardship thinkers, only serve to back up Clare Palmer's observation.

[21] Philip Hodgson, *World Energy Needs and Resources*, Grove Ethical Studies, No.44, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1981: 24.

eschatological Christianity, which sees humanity as the pinnacle of the evolutionary process, and the end of the world and the winding up of human history as simultaneous events initiated by God. Furthermore, these events have been seen in the past not as meaning the extinction of humanity, but rather the point where the human race (or at least an elect portion of the human race) enters into its ultimate destiny of eternal glory with God.

It has to be said, however, that other stewardship literature still retains this traditional eschatological view. One particular example of this is an article by Mark Van Bebber, with the title "What is man's responsibility to the Environment". This article calls on Christian believers to be good stewards of creation, but also contains within it the claim that:

> The Bible is clear that the existence of the human race is not in jeopardy. God is in control of our destiny. He has planned the future for mankind....The Bible is very specific about the fact that the restoration and ultimate destruction of the earth is God's working and is not related to man's "fine tuning" of the environment.[22]

Nevertheless, such claims are fairly rare within the literature and, generally speaking, the realisation that the earth can continue quite happily without humanity allows the supporter of stewardship to take a less arrogant approach to the rest of the natural world, than that all too often seen in the churches. This again gives strength to stewardship theology, because it consequently regards nature as more than simply a backdrop for the drama of human salvation and so

[22] Mark Van Bebber, "What is man's responsibility to the Environment", Eden Communications. Taken from the Internet and reprinted in Christ Church, Downend, Parish Magazine, August 1997: 21.

affords it more respect. Furthermore, because it is realised that other organisms, like the plankton in the seas, are actually more important for the continuation of the earth than humans, then the position of humanity becomes tempered with at least some degree of humility. Again, in the words of Philip Hodgson:

> This need for reorientation extends to our attitude to animals, plants, and to the earth itself. We need to rediscover a sense of continuity with our material roots.....Christianity teaches us a concern and reverence for the whole of creation, seeing man (*sic*) as God's steward and conscious of his organic unity with the whole biosphere and lithosphere.[23]

Yet, it is on this same point that some of the weakness of the stewardship approach begins to show through. The reason for this lies in an unwillingness to fundamentally reassess the place of the human in the "cosmic" (or so-called "God-given") order of being. According to this traditional order of being, God sits at the top of a cosmic hierarchy, humanity comes a close second, followed by animals, birds, and fish. The hierarchy thus far is clearly set out in the Bible; Psalm 8, for example, reads:

> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
> the moon and the stars that you have established;
> what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
> mortals that you care for them?
> Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
> and crowned them with glory and honour.
> You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
> you have put all things under their feet,

[23] Philip Hodgson, *op. cit.*, 1981: 24.

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea. (verses 3-8,)

At the bottom of this cosmic hierarchy, and not even worth a mention in the Psalm, are the plants and the rest of the natural world. There is within the stewardship literature a desire to keep this order of being and particularly to maintain humanity's second place in the cosmic hierarchy. It is often argued by proponents of this approach that many of our present environmental problems stem from the fact that we have put ourselves at the top of this hierarchy, and therefore in the place of God. What stewardship does, they claim, is to correct this mistake by putting God firmly back in place as Creator, Ruler, and Owner of the universe.

The image of God as owner of the universe, and so of the earth, is an important one to the supporters of this approach. The importance of this image lies in the premise that only the owner of a property has the right to treat it in any way he or she wishes (whether or not this is upheld in law is debatable, but that does not in any case change the premise). Human beings have in the past treated this planet *as if* they owned it. Emphasising God's ownership is seen as a corrective to this attitude. Such a view sees humans as tenants rather than owners, and tenants have no right to do anything substantial to the property without the prior consent of the owner.[24] Indeed, they are expected to keep the property in good order and

[24] Some would argue that even then, passages like Psalm 8 and Genesis 1: 28 about dominion can be interpreted as the owner (God) giving the tenant (humanity) prior consent to do what they want with the property.

eventually to return it to the owner in at least as good a condition as when they first took up tenancy.

It could perhaps be argued that this is too legalistic a way to describe the relationship between the divine, human beings, and the earth, but to stewardship theologians this is necessary in order to redress the mistakes of the past. This has led some of them to reinterpret the parable of the talents, found in Matthew's gospel (25:14-30), in an ecological way. In the parable, the master calls his servants and announces that he is going away. He then gives each of them some of his riches to take care of during his absence. Two of the servants make a profit for their master while he is gone, whilst the third simply preserves what he has been given. On the master's return, the two who have made a profit are praised, and the third, who can only return the same as he was given, is thrown out penniless. This is interpreted as a call to look after the earth and return it in even better condition to God than when human beings first received it from God.[25]

Perhaps the greatest weakness of this image of the relationship between God, humanity, and the earth, is that it contains within it the suggestion that God is some kind of absentee landlord. Having created all things, and put humans in as tenants to look after it all, God then retreats to heaven with a vague promise of a return at some future point to wind up history and judge us on how we have cared for the property entrusted to us. According to Anne Primavesi, this image paints a picture of a God "who never visits the land but is only interested in banking the returns from it, i.e. human souls". Those who are good stewards, therefore, "seek

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[25] See, for example, Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature*, Word (UK), 1992: 22-24.

to optimize profits for themselves or their boss".[26] Clare Palmer makes a similar point by imaging the relationship between God and humanity "like that between a master and a servant on a feudal estate".[27]

In the light of this approach, therefore, human beings are still in charge of the planet, albeit only in that they hold it in temporary trust for their divine master, who will one day want it back. This is as far as most of the supporters of stewardship are prepared to go in revising the position of humanity in the cosmic hierarchy. There is, in addition, almost unanimous support for the continuation of the hierarchical ordering of life, despite the acknowledgement of an essential unity between the human and the non-human. According to David Hallman, in his essay "Science, Religion, and Development: Sources of Destruction, Seeds of Hope"[28], the need to retain the human position over nature means that stewardship has "to be viewed with a degree of healthy scepticism." He continues:

> Though it emphasizes a more responsible and caring relationship to Creation, stewardship still places humans in the position of power. It is a management model. It assumes that we know what is best for the Earth. But the tree has done a pretty good job of growing on its own....We have to learn how to live with the rest of Creation, not continually try to control it, whether benevolently intended or not.[29]

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[26] Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism, and Christianity*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1991: 107.
[27] Clare Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1992: 74.
[28] David Hallman, "Science, Religion, and Development: Sources of Destruction, Seeds of Hope", *Ecology A Theological Response*, ed. Andreas Nehring, Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological Institute, 1994: 173-185.
[29] *ibid.*, p.183.

Even those writers who are prepared to challenge the explicit hierarchical order, like Douglas John Hall, do still appear to want to hang on to an implicit hierarchy. This does at times lead to a very delicate balancing act, which can even seem to leave human beings floating around in a kind of limbo somewhere between God and the rest of creation. In his defence, Hall does at least recognise what he is doing and, in his book *Imaging God*, gives the following description of such a position:

> We have rejected the common assumption of conventional Western Christendom that humanity is "above" nature; and we have also rejected the romantic reaction to that convention that wants to put humankind "back into" nature. We are thus left with a human creature who is neither strictly discontinuous with the other creatures nor strictly continuous with them: he/she is not merely "natural" as other creatures are natural; yet neither is he/she "unnatural, whether sub- or supernatural.[30]

What Hall fails to do, it seems to me, is resolve the situation. Even when it comes to examining the relationship of the human being to God, there is once again a kind of balancing act to be performed. Hall uses the phrase "being with" to describe this relationship, which is quite alright in itself; but he then goes on to explain that this means that humans are neither "in God" nor are they utterly "apart from God".[31] They are, therefore, still left hanging around in some sort of vague area in between, neither one thing nor another.

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[30] Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986: 59. For another critique of Hall's stewardship theology, see, Lucy Larkin, "Douglas John Hall – The Stewardship Symbol and the Image of God", *Theology in Green*, Issue No.7, July 1993: 13-19.
[31] *ibid.*, p144.

However, as Hall unravels more of what he means by the phrase "being with God", it becomes increasingly apparent that an implicit hierarchical order of life is in operation here, even if it has been explicitly denied elsewhere in his work. Hall claims that God is a "Being-in-relationship" (something apparently "proved" by the doctrine of the Trinity) and as such needs to have creatures to be in relationship with. For that purpose, God created humanity "in his image", i.e. capable of having the desired reciprocal relationship with God. This immediately implies that human beings are the only creatures with which God can have such a relationship, thereby making them superior to all the other creatures on this planet in at least that one sense.[32]

This primary relationship between God and humanity is characteristic of the stewardship approach and has been evident from the earliest formulations of stewardship theology. Thomas Derr states that "Nature is a complement to the primary drama of redemption which takes place in history"[33] and H. Paul Santmire comments that stewardship theology.....

> .....can be summarized in one generalization: *Christian theology has to do primarily with human history* – with the unfolding providential story of God and humanity, with God and the people of God, or with God and the believing human soul – *not with nature.*[34]

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[32] *ibid.*, p.144-146. Hall actually goes even further than this by implying that the Christian human is the only one that can truly achieve this reciprocity with God and asserts "the Christian life as the beginning of.....genuine humanity". From this, it would be reasonable to assume not only a hierarchy of being, but also a hierarchy of human being with Christians placed firmly at the top.
[33] Thomas Derr, 1975: 23. As quoted in H. Paul Santmire, *op. cit.*, 1985: 4.
[34] H. Paul Santmire, *op. cit.*, 1985: 4. Elsewhere it is put much more bluntly: The environment is important, but God is more concerned with the souls of people." Mark Van Bebber, *op. cit.*, August 1997: 22.

Nowhere in the stewardship literature does there appear to be a willingness to abandon the idea of hierarchy completely. Consequently, with the notion of hierarchy so rigidly fixed in the theology of stewardship, the place of the non-human is also fundamentally unchanged from that often found in traditional Christianity. Even if stewardship asserts clearly that the Earth is God's and humanity is only here to oversee things on God's behalf, that still leaves the rest of the natural world stuck firmly at the bottom of the hierarchy. As Clare Palmer points out, "owned by one, and managed by the other" nature appears "to be in a powerless position".[35] In other words, non-human nature still has no say in the process, nor does it even need to be considered beyond how best it is to be "managed".

Part of the reason for the continuation of this view of nature is that there is within stewardship a strong resistance to ideas of pantheism (the belief that the whole of reality is divine) and even panentheism (the belief that God includes and permeates but is also greater than reality). This is despite the fact that the latter of these, panentheism, is widespread historically in both Christian mystical writings and Celtic Christianity, and continues to find a voice today in modern versions of these as well as in Christian process theology.[36] Any hint or suggestion that nature might be sacred is viewed with great suspicion, as if to be avoided at all costs. This aversion to seeing God in the non-human manifests itself in a variety of ways within the stewardship literature. In some cases it is evident right away in the title of the work; for example in Tony Campolo's book *How to Rescue the Earth*

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[35] Clare Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1992: 74.
[36] See, for example, the works of A.N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Without Worshipping Nature (Word (UK), 1992). In others, it may be left to a more discreet reference in the notes or appendix, as in *Whose Earth* by Chris Seaton, who writes:

> In the melting pot of spiritual ideas found in the New Age movement, animistic religions like Shamanism find especial favour, offering an opportunity to "find oneness with God" in nature. In the light of this, Christian environmentalists need to be very careful when we talk about the presence of God within the creation.[37]

Such an attitude usually leads to a very stunted theology of the Holy Spirit. In this, the presence of God within the creation is seen as only being manifest through the Holy Spirit, whose activity is then limited to the human aspect of that creation, and often only in certain humans (Christians). Meanwhile, the distancing of God from the rest of creation is further maintained by the continuing use of such terms as "Almighty", "King", "Ruler", and so on when addressing the divine. All of which serves to maintain the sacred hierarchy, and places God securely outside and above the non-human creation.

This insistence upon the non-sacred character of nature, coupled with the belief held by most stewardship theologians that nature is "fallen", leaves the non-human world not only dependent upon humanity for its management, but also for its "salvation". The primordial fall of humanity apparently dragged the whole cosmos in its wake leaving an imperfect creation, within which we now live. Earthquakes, hurricanes, erupting volcanoes, and the like are put forward as evidence for this "fact". In this scheme of things, natural disasters which kill and

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[37] Chris Seaton, *Whose Earth*, Cambridge: Crossway Books, 1992: 212.

injure people happen because nature is imperfect (or even, some would say, evil), rather than because people sometimes choose, or are forced, to live in environments that are naturally unsuitable for human habitation.

But perhaps the most often quoted evidence for the "fact" of a fallen creation is the presence of death and decay in nature. Death and decay are seen everywhere as being negative. The whole creation is seen as being in "bondage" to decay and death (see Romans 8:21), both of which are in turn seen as the result of sin, specifically human sin. Just as death in human beings is perceived by much of Christianity as being an enemy to be overcome, so too is death in nature.[38]

Being fallen, therefore, the cosmos needs to be "saved" just as much as humanity does. However, because the fall of nature is claimed to have happened as a result of the fall of humanity, so the redemption of the whole creation is also apparently dependent upon the redemption of this one species on this one tiny planet. A Bible passage frequently put forward to support this argument is that of Romans 8:19-23:

> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the

[38] See, for example, Hodgson, *op. cit.*, 1981: 22: "Christ...has shown us a way of life that overcomes death...."

> Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

This passage is taken by most stewardship theologians to imply a cosmic fall.[39] The motif of the "new Adam", also taken from Paul (see, for example, Colossians 1:15-20), completes the picture. In a lecture given at the Selly Oak Colleges Summer School,[40] Philip Seddon talks of creation as being "drawn into the sin of Adam" and thus "inextricably bound up with the fate of humanity". It is, therefore, fallen just as humanity is fallen. Furthermore, the hope for the natural universe lies in the same place as the hope for the human race, now that "the new Adam has reversed the irreversible process of corruption, decay and death". Christ's saving power through the cross is ultimately for the whole cosmos, although humans must be saved first: "because creation itself lives under the promise, it will be set free to share in the glorious liberty of the children of God: creation follows where Christ's people show the way".[41] Such ideas stem from the notion that the universe was created for human use as a backdrop for the drama of human salvation, a notion which stewardship theology appears unable to leave behind completely.

This leaves non-human nature in the position of always being second best, forever in the shadow of its own "purpose and end" – the human being. It is difficult to

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[39] One notable exception to this is Keith Innes, who writes: "It is however possible that the word *ktisis* translated 'created universe' means here 'creature', so that the reference is to men and women themselves.....In support of this interpretation, E. Brunner argues "It is not the creation that is 'fallen' but man; the revelation in the creation has not been destroyed but by sin man perverts into idolatry that which God has given him." Similarly, Adolph Schlatter writes: "Our rebellion leads only to the corruption of our human will, not of nature..."." Keith Innes, *op. cit.*, 1991: 15.

[40] Published in pamphlet form as part of a series of "Southwell and Oxford Papers on Contemporary Society", March 1990.

[41] *ibid.*, p.9.

see how this view, which is essentially still hierarchical, can ever engender the kind of deep, heart-felt *metanoia* necessary to bring about an end to human exploitation of the non-human.

It can be clearly seen, therefore, that although the stewardship approach does at least acknowledge and address the present ecological crisis, it still falls far short of any radical rethinking of Christianity and Christian theology in the light of environmental concern. This has led some theologians to dub the stewardship approach an "apologetic" approach. One such is John F. Haught, who writes:

> I call this approach apologetic because it defends the integrity of biblical religion and traditional theology without requiring their transformation. It holds, at least implicitly, that Christianity is essentially okay as it is, that environmental abuse stems only from perversions of pure faith and not from anything intrinsic to it, and therefore that Christianity does not need to undergo much of a change in the face of the present emergency. Rather, we need only to bring our environmental policies into conformity with revelation and time-tested doctrine.[42]

In other words, this approach fails to really challenge traditional Christian theology and world-views. This failure is perhaps not surprising in the current theological climate in which, as H. Paul Santmire points out, "According to a large number of contemporary theological writers.....Christian theology never has had, nor should it have, a substantive ecological dimension."[43] Nevertheless, such

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[42] John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993: 92.

[43] H. Paul Santmire, *op. cit.*, 1985: 3. I would perhaps agree that Christian theology never has had a substantive ecological dimension, but it is the thrust of this thesis that it should have one.

a failure does render stewardship theology quite ineffective when it comes to engendering a new world-view which takes seriously the value of non-human nature. Again in the words of John Haught:

> .....I do not think that this apologetic type goes far enough in opening Christian faith to the radical renewal the ecological crisis seems to demand. I seriously doubt that we can adequately confront the problems facing our natural environment, theologically speaking, simply by being more emphatic about familiar moral exhortations or by endlessly exegeting scriptural passages about the goodness of nature or the importance of stewardship.[44]

Even in its better formulations, stewardship can therefore only be described as a useful "first step", in that it does at least encourage its adherents to have a more ecologically sound life-style. But this is presented for the most part in a very practical and shallow way, which, whilst linked to duty to God, does not represent a change at the deepest level of our being and would be unlikely to lead to an ecological spirituality in its followers. Indeed, Clare Palmer argues that it could actively prevent the search for such a spirituality:

> ....stewardship can act as a comfortable concept blinkering us to the deeper philosophical and theological problems raised by the environmental crisis. Stewardship allows humanity to continue with exploitative attitudes towards the natural world, often with the justification that God has given this authority.[45]

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[44] John F. Haught, *op. cit.*, 1993: 93.
[45] Clare Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1992: 84.

The main reason for this is the reluctance on the part of stewardship theology to really challenge the traditional beliefs of Western Christianity concerning such things as the hierarchy of being, including the privileged position of humanity, and the obsession with the avoidance of any hint of sacredness about the natural world. Essentially, therefore, rather than answering the questions raised by Lynn White, stewardship theology leaves in place the very things he criticised. Far from countering the allegations of White, this approach underlines the correctness of much of his critique.

The stewardship approach at best only encourages a superficial environmental responsibility, and even this is done without fundamentally challenging Christian presuppositions on the lowly place of nature. It does not establish a deep ecological concern, nor does it come close to engendering a care for the natural for its own sake, both of which are vital in any ecological spirituality. Stewardship does not, on its own, give the churches any real green credibility. It is therefore necessary to move beyond stewardship, if we are to discover a truly ecological Christian spirituality.

Chapter Three: Beyond Stewardship – The Ecological Jesus

3.1: The Need for a Credible Christology

The search for a truly ecological Christian spirituality must lead us beyond the boundaries of much Christian thought to date, including that of the stewardship theologians. The alternative is to only superficially alter the edges of traditional Christian doctrine and theology in the way attempted by the stewardship approach. As already illustrated, this leads at best to a minimal amount of practical steps towards a more ecological lifestyle on the part of believers; for example, recycling more of their household waste than before or using recycled paper. What it fails to do, however, is to effect the *metanoia*, the complete change of heart, that is essential if any major changes in lifestyle and attitudes are going to take place within the Christian population of the affluent nations (let alone within those populations as a whole). Such major changes are becoming increasingly necessary for large segments of the earth's human population, if further environmental degradation and perhaps even ecological disaster are to be averted.

These changes will require a very different world-view to that currently held by most of mainstream western Christianity. They will involve, for example, very different ways of viewing what it is to be human and very different images of the divine, than many of those previously put forward by Christian theology. Therefore, any Christian spirituality that attempts such changes as it endeavours to become and remain truly ecological is likely to constantly face the charge that it is

not, in fact, Christian at all. In order to combat such a charge, it is necessary throughout the search for an ecological spirituality to always ask the question: "Is it still Christian?"

Central to the answer to this question is the issue of "Christology", or the study of Jesus Christ. As John Macquarrie states in his book *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*:

> Christianity, as the name implies, has Jesus Christ at its very centre, so that if Christology is concentrated on a study of Jesus Christ, it is not so much a branch of Christian theology as its central theme; or, at least, it shares the centre with the equally fundamental doctrine of God.[1]

So the question "Is it Christian?" leads on immediately to another, namely: "What is the place of Jesus Christ within the spirituality we are searching for?" It is that second question that this chapter and the one that follows will attempt to answer. This will indeed involve issues surrounding both the notion of what it is to be human and the image of the divine, especially given that Jesus Christ has traditionally been seen as the place where both the human and divine meet. The fourth century creeds asserted that Jesus was both "fully God" and "fully man". The Nicene Creed, for example, states:

> We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
> the only Son of God,
> eternally begotten of the Father,

[1] John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, London: SCM, 1990: 3.

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.[2]

Ever since the formulation of this doctrine in the creeds, Christian orthodoxy has constantly struggled to maintain this dual nature of Christ.

However, from a truly ecological perspective, there are certain problems with the assertion that Jesus Christ was both "fully human" and "fully God", and particularly with the way the person of Christ has been presented hitherto. These problems have meant that the traditional picture of the central figure of Christianity has been one which has led many ecologically-minded thinkers, including ecofeminist writers, to abandon Christianity as hopelessly tied to a dominant male human perspective. What is needed, therefore, is what Anne Primavesi terms an "ecochristian response".[3] At the centre of such a response must be an eco-Christology, leading to an understanding of what may be meant by the "eco-Christ". Such a Christology would have to explore issues surrounding both the man, Jesus of Nazareth, and the eternal Christ from the standpoint of ecology and in the light of the current environmental concerns. The first of these,

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[2] The Nicene Creed, as printed in *The Alternative Service Book*, London: SPCK, 1980: 181-2.
[3] Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1991: 128.

the man of history and the gospels, is the subject of the rest of this chapter, whilst the eternal Christ will be looked at in the next.

3.2: Jesus of Nazareth

Given that, for an ecological spirituality, many of the problems concerning the traditional interpretations of Christ centre around the other-worldly and supernatural attributes of that figure, it is perhaps prudent to begin with the slightly less problematical person of Jesus of Nazareth. At least here we have a real human being, firmly rooted in the social, political, and religious environment of his day, as well as being flesh and blood and descended from the same stardust from whence we have all come. The person of Jesus is an historical reality. As Kamal Salibi states in his book *Who was Jesus*: "That he existed, scholars are in no doubt, there is enough evidence outside the Christian scriptures."[4] It is not the intention of this work to enter into the historical debate, therefore, nor even to argue for or against the historical accuracy of the gospels themselves. Rather it is to ask the question: Of what value is this man, as portrayed by the gospel writers, as a focus for environmental concern and ecological spirituality?

3.3: Jesus and Nature

One of the most immediate and obvious answers to this question is to point to the repeated references to both animals and nature that Jesus used in his teaching.

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[4] Kamal Salibi, *Who was Jesus? A Conspiracy in Jerusalem*, London: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, 1992: 1. There have, of course been many books written about the "historical Jesus" over the last two centuries or so, including relatively recently, Leander E. Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus*, London: SCM, 1971. Even more recently there has been the inevitable next step with, for example, William Hamilton, *A Quest for the Post-Historical Jesus*, London: SCM, 1993.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus painted an image of God as one who cares for even the tiniest of creatures, such as sparrows for example: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." (Matthew 10:29, cf. Luke 12:6). He also referred to a God who "clothes the grass of the field" and gives to the flowers their attractiveness: "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Luke 12:27)[5] Examples like these have been much quoted throughout the stewardship literature, in order to illustrate the love that Jesus had for the natural environment around him, and to demonstrate his concern for all the animals and creatures that inhabit this earth along with human beings.[6]

It is, of course, quite right to make such observations. There can be little doubt, simply from the frequency of nature references contained within the teachings of Jesus, that both the natural environment and all life – human and non-human – were important to him as windows into the divine nature of God. However, it would be wrong to read too much into these references, or to ignore what is also contained within them; that is, an anthropocentrism that unquestioningly accepts the presence of a sacred hierarchy of being. To quote again from Luke, chapter 12: "Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap.....and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!" (12:24) and, "If God so clothes the grass of the field.....how much more will he clothe you." (12:28). As has already been shown in the previous chapters, this notion of a sacred hierarchy has

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[5] All Bible quotations taken from *The New Revised Standard Version*, unless otherwise stated.
[6] See, for example, Lewis G. Regenstein, *Replenish the Earth*, London: SCM, 1991, and many other studies.

almost certainly been a contributory factor in the negative attitude of Christianity towards nature.

There are also other biblical stories that appear to illustrate a tendency towards a quite unnecessary destruction of nature and other animals on the part of Jesus. For example, there is the story of the fig tree that had no figs on it when he was hungry. Jesus cursed the fig tree, even though, as Mark's gospel states "it was not the right time for figs" (Mark 11:13). As a result of this curse, according to the gospels of Mark and Matthew, the fig tree withered and died.

Then there is the strange tale of the Gerasene swine. Here, Jesus cures a demon-possessed man by causing the demons to leave him and enter instead a herd of pigs. This action causes the whole herd, numbering about two thousand in all, to rush down a steep bank into the sea and drown (Mark 5:11-13). Even taking into account the Jewish background of Jesus which would have taught him that pigs were unclean animals, neither this story nor that of the fig tree put Jesus in a very good light ecologically-speaking. It would be difficult, therefore, to sustain an argument in favour of Jesus' eco-credentials on the basis of his stories and actions regarding the natural world alone.

3.4: Jesus' Challenge to the Status Quo

Therefore, given the apparent ambiguity of his relationship with the rest of creation, it is necessary to state that the real value of Jesus to a truly ecological spirituality lies not so much in his pronouncements about nature as elsewhere. Far

more relevant to the search for such a spirituality might be, for example, Jesus' conviction that a radical new order must come on earth. As Juan Luis Segundo states in his book *Faith and Ideologies*, much of what Jesus was about was challenging the status quo. Furthermore, the way he challenged the status quo was by attempting to change people's fundamental ways of thinking and acting through giving them an alternative vision of reality:

> Jesus' preaching assumes that many of his listeners would be inclined to change their behaviour completely if they could really believe this datum: i.e., that the kingdom of God is at hand.....Thus Jesus offers a "reason" why a different meaning-structure should come to the forefront and replace the prevailing one in his listeners' minds. This other meaning-structure is already present in his listeners even though it is held under wraps by other considerations.....The fact is that every human being possesses a store of "utopias". They are meaning-structures that would come to occupy first place if reality were not what it is or seems to be.[7]

This notion of Jesus offering a new paradigm is backed up by the work of Denis Edwards, who writes in *Jesus the Wisdom of God* about the radical nature of the preaching and practice of the man from Nazareth:

> The wisdom Jesus preaches is the wisdom of God, which challenges traditional human wisdom, shattering conventional worldviews and opening out on to the world of the Reign of God. *This* Wisdom demands not just new ways of thinking, but an ortho-praxis in the light of God's coming Reign.[8]

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[7] Juan Luis Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, London: Sheen and Ward, 1984: 73.
[8] Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*, Homebush, NSW: St Pauls, 1995: 45.

What both of these writers also have in common, is a feeling that this new paradigm espoused by Jesus, this radical wisdom preached by him, is something that traditional Christian theology has not really taken seriously enough. Indeed, far from being a revolutionary teacher and thinker, much of the teaching of the Church has painted Jesus as the upholder of the status quo, and particularly of the prevailing social and religious structures at any one time. This has been the case since the earliest days of Christianity, as attested to by the letters of Paul. In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul writes:

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. (Romans 13:1-2)

These words of Paul would certainly put the lid on any thoughts of revolution or turning existing structure on their head, as Jesus tried to do. Elsewhere, Paul upholds the notion of a sacred hierarchy which gives divine sanction to the socially accepted norms of the time. One example of this comes from the first letter to the Corinthian Christians:

> .....I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of the wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head.....For a man ought not to have his

> head veiled since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. (I Corinthians 11:2-5,7)

Down through the centuries since these letters were written, passages like this have been used to suppress any notion of Christianity as a revolutionary faith. And the situation, particularly in the countries of the North, remains largely the same today, with a concentration on making good citizens in this world and preparing for the next, rather than challenging the status quo. Adrian B. Smith, in his book *The God Shift*, laments the fact that "our Christian theology has up to now been within the hierarchical paradigm (God above and outside his creation).....despite Jesus' attempt to give us an alternative paradigm two thousand years ago".[9]

In a sense, therefore, Jesus himself set out to effect a *metanoia* in his hearers in the early first century, just as ecological spirituality has the task of doing in the early twenty-first century. Furthermore, the fact that Christian tradition has not generally grasped (or has chosen to ignore) this aspect of Jesus' ministry, at least gives both liberation and ecological theologies a legitimate entrance point into a new and different set of images and understandings concerning the central figure of the Christian religion. It also gives the person of Jesus of Nazareth a claim to be the legitimate spearhead or focus of any movement that is seeking to significantly shift the world-view of large numbers of people. But is that as far as his claim goes, or can we be even more specific about the link between Jesus and a truly ecological spirituality? The answer appears to be, yes we can.

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[9] Adrian B. Smith, *The God Shift: Our Changing Perception of the Ultimate Mystery*, London: New Millennium, 1996: 42.

3.5: The Preferential Option

Many liberation theologies, particularly from Latin America but also from Africa and Asia, make a valid link between Jesus and what has become known as the "preferential option for the poor". This does not mean glorifying the poor, but rather tipping the scales in their favour in order to right the injustice that has seen the scales always tipped the other way; that is, against those who are powerless and voiceless in the world as it is currently constituted. To a considerable extent, it is the present imbalance that causes many instances of environmental degradation. The poor of the world are often forced to destroy the ecology of the areas they live in purely to survive. The intensive growing of single "cash crops" on land that would normally support a variety of crops, other uses, and natural habitats is but one example of this.

As we have seen already, stewardship is only an option for those who are wealthy and powerful. Even in this country, conservation has been described as "a rich farmers' toy" (Radio 4, *Good Morning*, 16/4/97). It is only those who have more than they need, who can afford to be environmentally sensitive in the way they use their land and resources. Poorer farmers, even in Britain, are forced to make a profit in whatever way they can, using every scrap of land available to them, even if that means clearing grass meadows or damaging the ecology of their area. Ironically, therefore, it is often those who are already well off or have land to spare, who gain from the subsidies given to farmers who, for example, "set aside" some of their land to be allowed to grow wild.

On a world-wide scale the same is true. It is the richer nations and "clubs" like the European Community that can afford to give subsidies for environmental schemes. That is not to say that all land use in the richer nations is ecologically sound. Indeed, where large areas have been cleared of hedgerows and woodland that is patently not the case. Also the recent increase in genetically modified crops (particularly in the United States of America) could be very damaging to the environment and to particular ecological systems. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the better off countries do at least have a choice and can choose to safeguard their environments should they wish to do so.

Poor nations, however, have to use any and every means to raise the money they need to survive. Despite the limited success of the Jubilee 2000 campaign by the churches and charities to get the debt burden of the poorest countries written off, many still have large debt repayments to make to the North, in addition to trying to fund better education and health-care for their populations. Often the necessity to raise the basic funding for these things involves making ecologically unsound decisions out of need rather than genuine choice.

The imbalance between rich and poor is stark. The liberation theologian Leonardo Boff describes it in this way:

> The astronauts have accustomed us to see the Earth as a blue-and-white spaceship floating in space, bearing the common fate of all beings. Actually, on this spaceship Earth, one-fifth of the population is travelling in the passenger section. They consume 80 percent of the

> supplies for the journey. The other four-fifths are travelling in the cargo hold. They suffer cold, hunger, and all kinds of hardships.[10]

Boff, too, sees the liberation of the poor and the solution to the ecological crisis as two inextricably bound strands of the challenges that face humanity in this new century. To an extent, therefore, Boff's starting point is social ecology, as described above in Chapter One of this thesis. The only way to avoid the environmental catastrophe that we face is by addressing matters of justice and liberation within human society. Only by liberating the poor, or by enabling them to bring about their own liberation, can we hope to liberate the earth from its own bondage to oppression and exploitation. The reason for this inextricable link is that it is the same logic, the same paradigm, the same world-view that holds both the poor and nature as expendable and there to be used and abused. As Boff, himself, states:

> The logic that exploits classes and subjects peoples to the interests of a few rich and powerful countries is the same as the logic that devastates the Earth and plunders its wealth, showing no solidarity with the rest of humankind and future generations.[11]

Only by changing that logic and giving the poor preference over the rich can we hope to save the environments that their poverty forces them to destroy. The man Jesus, who would rather surround himself with the powerless than the powerful, and who stood up for the poor whilst chastising the rich, must surely have a place in focussing such a preference.

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[10] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman, New York: Orbis Books, 1997: 111.
[11] *ibid.*, xi.

Linked to this is another form of exploitation which is becoming known as "environmental racism". Environmental racism is born out of the NIMBY syndrome – Not In My Back Yard. None of us want the factories or chemical plants that cause the most pollution to be near to our homes, yet we still want the benefits that come from those industries. So the factories and plants have to be situated somewhere. One option is to put them in the poor countries of the South, where cheap labour to run them is also an added bonus. The other option, is to place them in the poor areas of rich countries, giving the promise of jobs to the local population as an incentive. In countries like the United States of America, such poor areas are usually populated by black or immigrant communities. Mark Wallace, in his essay "The Wounded Spirit as the Basis for Hope in an Age of Radical Ecology", gives an example of one such community; that of Chester in Delaware County, Pennsylvania:

> Chester is an impoverished, predominantly African American community in an almost all-white suburb, Delaware County. It's median family income is 45 percent lower than the rest of Delaware County.....and its unemployment rate is 30 percent. Chester has the highest infant mortality rate and the highest percentage of low-weight births in the state. In the light of its alarmingly bad public health, Chester would appear to be the last place to build a constellation of hazardous facilities. Nevertheless, three waste and treatment plants recently have been built on a square-mile site surrounded by homes and parks in a low-income area of Chester..... Chester is Delaware County's sacrifice zone. The surrounding middle-class, white

> neighbourhoods would never allow for the systematic overexposure of their citizens to such a toxics complex.[12]

This is environmental racism and it is no less evil than any other kind of racism. During his ministry, Jesus attempted to break down the racism of his day, even praising the faith of gentiles and making the hero of one of his parables a Samaritan, even though the Samaritans were hated by his own Jewish people. Indeed, the story of the Good Samaritan, as related in the gospel of Luke (chapter 10:29-37) shows this hated race to be better neighbours than even those in religious authority, thus turning the prejudices of the Jews on their head. Therefore, once again, the man Jesus of Nazareth would be worthy to inspire any attempts to overthrow environmental racism.

3.6: Extending the Values of Jesus

Jesus has also become a symbol of compassion. It is true that in his teaching he was only talking about compassion for other people and not compassion for all living things, which is a central theme of eco-theology. Nevertheless, it must be remembered whenever applying the words and actions of Jesus to ecological issues, that he was not addressing a people aware of an environmental crisis. Therefore, we cannot expect him to have expressed himself in the light of environmental concerns because such issues were simply not around in his day (and despite the claims of some, Jesus was undoubtedly a man of his time, even if a remarkable one). However, we are now facing those issues and so have to either

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[12] Mark I Wallace, "The Wounded Spirit as the Basis for Hope in an Age of Radical Ecology", *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, eds. Dieter T Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, Harvard University Press, 2000: 64-65.

dismiss the words and actions of Jesus altogether, or make them applicable to our situation of crisis. As it is the intention of this work to do the latter, surely it is legitimate to extend the meaning of what Jesus said and did to cover all life, not just human life. Jesus can then become a symbol of compassion for all living things.

And again, Jesus is seen as embracing the values of love, justice, and peace. He claimed, for example, that the commandments to love God and to love your neighbour are the greatest commandments of all (Matthew 22:37-39). Indeed, Jesus went much further than this and even told his followers to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44). In addition, in his final discourse to the disciples, as recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus said, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love on another" (John 13:34), thus making himself a pattern for love.

In his teaching, Jesus praised those who "hunger and thirst" after justice (Matthew 5:6) and he condemned the Pharisees for their neglect of what was just and right (Luke 11:42). He also challenged many of the injustices of his day by such acts as his intervention in the stoning of a woman "caught in the very act of adultery" (John 8:2-11). Furthermore, Jesus' angry outburst in the Temple courtyard (Mark 11:15-18) could be said to stem from his disgust at the unjust way in which money was extorted from the poor and profit made from religious ritual. As we have seen above, this kind of justice and especially the challenge to the injustices suffered by the poor, are both fundamental to any solution of the current ecological crisis.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" is one of the beatitudes found in Matthew's gospel (5:9) and is an indication of Jesus' own commitment to peace. He wept over Jerusalem because the city had not recognised "the things that make for peace" (Luke 19:41). In addition, his commitment to non-violence (to all but moneychangers' tables!) is well documented throughout the gospels, but is probably most obvious at the point of his arrest in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Even when his own life was in danger and the temptation to lash out was perhaps at its strongest, Jesus still condemned the raising of a sword in his defence (Luke 22:49-51).[13] And the writer of John relates that "peace" was Jesus' parting gift to his disciples (John 14:27).

So it can be clearly demonstrated that Jesus' teaching and example did underline the values of love, justice, and peace; all three of which have strong connections with green issues and would have to play a large part in any solutions to the present crisis. These values, too, although originally intended by Jesus to be about the way we act towards our human brothers and sisters only, can and should now be applied to the whole of the living earth; for the simple reason that we are currently facing an ecological crisis such as was not being faced by the people of first century Palestine. In fact, it would be a favourable first step if the majority of humanity would at least follow these three core values when dealing with other members of the human race. However, it would undoubtedly be to the advantage of the whole world and all life upon it, if the values of love, peace, and justice

[13] Although it is interesting to note that a few verses earlier (22:35-38) the writer of Luke records that it is Jesus himself who requests that the disciples bring the swords with them to the Mount of Olives to fulfil scripture.

were to be the cornerstone of future human interaction with the whole biosphere. The truth of this is quite easily illustrated.

Peace and a non-violent ethic are both vital if the ecology of our planet is to be preserved. War and violence both cost this earth dear. It needs to be remembered that most war today is "total war"; that is it destroys not only human life, but whole environments and ecosystems. And all the time, huge resources are being put into finding ever more destructive (and "smarter") weaponry.[14] Quite simply, the vast amounts of money spent on weapons that are designed to destroy life could better be spent on initiatives designed to enhance all life. These initiatives could include, for example, constructive aid to the poor to enable them to improve their own well-being and economic situation through sustainable development, along with much needed research into renewable sources of energy and sustainable transport systems.

However, just to reduce the amounts of money spent on arms is not enough in itself; it must also be accompanied by an ethic of non-violence (which needs to be directed to all life). Peace on its own does not ensure the safety of our ecology, particularly when that peace is upheld by military might with its underlying threat of violence. The military is a destroyer of environments even in peace time, with vast areas of land set aside solely for military training and manoeuvres.

If we consider the subject of justice, environmental issues immediately come to the fore. Perhaps the most obvious is the effect that the injustice of world trade,

[14] This new weaponry was on full display in the one-sided war against Iraq in March and April, 2003.

along with debt, has on the ecology of the poor nations. As we have already seen, poverty forces countries to cut down their forests or plough up thousands of acres of land for cash-crops, in order to gain some kind of revenue. The current rules of world trade ensure that these countries can never escape from their poverty, and therefore can never escape from the need to cause ecological harm. Indeed these injustices are continuing to widen the gap between rich and poor countries which will undoubtedly only serve to exacerbate the detrimental effect on the environment. The World Summit which has recently taken place in Johannesburg in South Africa (August/September 2002) has not resulted in any agreements that will significantly change this situation.

Injustices perpetrated against women often have an impact on the environment as well, particularly when it comes to issues such as population control. Many thousands of women are denied education on anything that may allow them to take control of their own lives, including issues like birth control and contraception (and many women are refused contraception because of religious rules). And yet, human population growth poses one of the greatest threats to our planet's ecology. The American Association for the Advancement of Science stated back in 1994 that: "To do nothing to control population numbers is to condemn future humans to a lifetime of absolute poverty, suffering, starvation, disease, and associated violent conflicts."[15] One cannot even begin to imagine the environmental destruction that is contained in such a scenario. However, the only way effective measure can be taken to control population and avoid this horrific scenario is if the injustices against women are halted and women themselves are

[15] Quoted at a day conference entitled "Christian Responsibility and the Environment" held at Bristol University on 2nd March 1996, arranged by Bristol School of Christian Studies.

empowered to find solutions. In an essay entitled "Incentives, Consumption Patterns, and Population Policies: A Christian Ethical Perspective", James Martin-Schramm concludes concerning population policies:

> .....if incentives or disincentives are considered, they should be designed, implemented, and evaluated by those most directly affected by them. In almost all cases, this will be women. It may, in fact, be possible to distinguish *supportive* or *empowering* measures from *coercive* incentives or disincentives. Some incentives actually increase the moral agency of women rather than undermine it. The key is that those most affected should have the power to decide.[16]

Yet today women continue to be discriminated against and, eight years on from the statement by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the same injustices against women are still very much in evidence in many parts of the world.

Love is perhaps not a word found often in academic enquiry. It is, though, as discussed above, a central part of the teaching of Jesus. Love also underpins all that has already been said about justice and peace. It is a lack of love for one another that has led to the unjust and violent situation of much of present day human society, and it is a lack of love for all life that has got humanity into the ecological crisis in which it now finds itself. One definition of love is "to regard with benevolence"[17] and such an attitude towards the non-human on the part of

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[16] James B. Martin-Schramm, "Incentives, Consumption Patterns, and Population Policies: A Christian Ethical Perspective", *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, eds. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, Harvard University Press, 2000: 449.

[17] Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, Edinburgh: W&R Chambers Ltd, 1975: 778.

humanity would help to safeguard the natural creation in a way that is not evident in the world today. Love for all life necessitates a radical change in the way large numbers of the human population live at present; the *metanoia* of ecological spirituality.

Compassion, love, justice, and peace, then, are themes from the teachings and example of Jesus which can be used in the fostering of ecological thinking and in encouraging a practical response to the current crisis, and even towards the development of an ecological spirituality. Indeed, as discussed above, it must surely be legitimate in the context of the present environmental crisis, to extend all of the teachings of Jesus to include not only our oppressed and poor human sisters and brothers, but also all life that we share this planet with, and the planet itself. That is certainly the opinion of Sally McFague and she states the argument in this way:

> While there is little in Jesus' teachings about nature.....his ministry to the oppressed can be extended to nature. His parables, which overturn human hierarchies, should include the hierarchy of humans over nature; his healing stories can be extended to the deteriorating ecosystems of our planet; his practice of eating with outcasts is pertinent to the extinction of species and loss of habitats due to human over-development and consumption.
>
> Who are the oppressed to who Jesus' message of hope and renewal is preached? The answer has changed over the centuries.....The inclusion of nature as the "new Poor" may seem sentimental or even

> ludicrous from an anthropocentric perspective, but it does not seem so from either a theocentric or cosmocentric point of view.[18]

So the values of Jesus can be extended to include the planet and all life upon it and therefore can have significance for the formulation of a truly ecological spirituality.

3.7: The Problem of Miracles

However, when it comes to considering Jesus of Nazareth as a figurehead for ecological concern, one of the most difficult areas to deal with is that of the miracles the gospel accounts claim he performed. The principal reason for this, centres around something that is at the heart of all ecological endeavour, and that is a respect for the "laws" of nature. One of the major concerns of environmentally-minded people is that humanity, although in fact limited by the same biological restrictions as any other species, is currently convinced it is "above" such limitations and can flout the natural laws with impunity. Those same laws, however, dictate that for every transgression by the human animal, there is a corresponding "price to pay", which is paid either by other humans or another group of animals or plants (or a combination of them all). These laws are universal and immutable in the sense that no one form of life can simply lay them on one side, and certainly no one human being can perform feats that transcend them.

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[18] Sally McFague, "An Ecological Christology: Does Christianity Have It?", *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, eds. Dieter T Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000: 35.

The miracles of Jesus appear to suggest a contrary view, and one that could be said to encourage humanity to think it can operate outside these natural restrictions. It would be difficult, therefore, for any truly ecological Christian spirituality to accept these miracles as they have been traditionally presented. Nevertheless, the so-called nature miracles recounted by the gospel writers are seen by much of the stewardship literature as proof that Jesus was and is Lord of creation. C.E. Gunton, for example, in his book *Christ and Creation*, states that these "actions are representations of the authority of Christ over creation." He goes on to make the case for Christ being the restorer of "that dominion over creation which is one dimension of the human calling" and which was lost at the Fall. "Here is true Adam," writes Gunton, "exercising the dominion that hitherto the human race had failed to achieve."[19] Such sentiments betray exactly the kind of anthropocentrism that makes many supporters of deep ecology suspicious of Christianity, and that a truly ecological spirituality would have to avoid.

If the nature miracles have any value or place at all in such a spirituality, it is only to show that, in the normal run of things, the forces of nature are actually ultimately more powerful than any force humanity can muster. Basically, however, an ecological spirituality would have to reject these miracles in any literal sense, and assert instead that they are largely a literary tool of the gospel writers, used to emphasise what they wanted to say about the authority of Jesus. John Macquarrie makes the same point when he asks whether the writer of the gospel of John, for example, ever "intended such stories to be taken literally." Rather, suggests Macquarrie, "He calls the miracles signs.....they point beyond

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[19] C.E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1992: 18-20.

themselves to the only true miracle, the new life from God which Jesus is bringing."[20]

It is also worth remembering that these stories were written almost two thousand years ago, at a time when many of the things which science has now explained for us would have been seen as miracles. In addition, it should be noted that to the religious mind, as John Maquarrie again states: "Any event is potentially a miracle, that is to say, as a 'sign of the infinite'."[21] In which case, the distinction between miracles and natural events becomes blurred and can effectively be abolished. Then the supernatural/unnatural element of the miracles of Jesus can be rejected, without denying that the actions of Jesus as recorded in these events may have been "signs of the infinite".

It is quite possible that Jesus himself rejected all such "wonder-working" in any case. He is constantly recorded by the gospel writers denying people a "sign" to prove his identity, and is portrayed refusing the temptation to perform miracles when tempted to do so by Satan, during his forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4 v.1-11 and parallels). If this is true, and Jesus did not see any need to perform miracles in order to back up his ministry, then it is even more likely that the miracle stories originated with the writers themselves, as a way of supporting their claims about Jesus. In which case, again the miracles need not be a stumbling block to an ecological reading of the teaching, ministry, and life of this man from Nazareth.

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[20] John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, London: SCM, 1990: 120.
[21] *ibid.*, p.200.

Indeed, if these miracle stories are taken as symbols rather than literal occurrences, they can even be used to enhance such an ecological reading. As before, this involves extending the boundaries of the original texts to include all life rather than just human life. If we do this, then the healing stories, for example, can become concerned with the basic health of the whole planet and every living creature upon it, rather than being confined to issues of human health (although they still include such issues).

In her essay entitled, "The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ", Sally McFague states that the healings in the gospels "force us, as Christians, to face up to the deep sickness of the many bodies that make up God." McFague goes on to say that "denial of the planets' profoundly deteriorating condition.....is not Christian because, if we extend the Christic healing ministry to all of creation, then we must work for the health of its many creatures and the planet itself."[22] Seen in this way, the healing miracles of Jesus become a potent ecological symbol, and one which puts the onus on Christians to care for the physical well-being of the whole Earth and all of its human and non-human inhabitants. The feeding miracles can similarly be extended to include provision for the basic nutritional needs of all the creatures that share this tiny planet.

Such gospel stories, inspired by the life of Jesus of Nazareth, can therefore become springboards for environmental concern and the deep-felt need for a change in our attitude towards non-human nature.

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[22] Sally McFague, "The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ", *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, London: Routledge, 1996: 293.

3.8: The Life and Death of Jesus

Furthermore, the life of Jesus is in itself important to an ecological spirituality, in contrast to traditional Christian teaching which has tended to lay a greater emphasis on his death than on the years of his ministry. It is his death that has been seen as *the* salvific event of the whole Jesus story, for it is then that it is claimed he took the sins of the world upon him and paid the price for our transgressions. Adrian Smith traces this separation of the death of Jesus from his life right back to the early Church, and perhaps even to the first disciples themselves. Smith claims that the belief of the disciples that the "brutal and unexpected death of Jesus must have a purpose in the divine plan" led the early Christians to draw upon their own Judaic cultural-religious background rather than on the actual teachings of Jesus himself. As a result, they soon developed a "cultic, priestly theory of atonement", in which "Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary became the central, indeed the unique, location of his saving action."[23] And yet, as Anne Primavesi points out, any separation of Jesus' death from his life is a mistake, because "They were in continuity and flowed naturally from one another."[24] To see his death as significant *in and of itself* is, therefore, to be guilty of only a partial reading of the full significance of Jesus (just as is any attempt to separate his humanity from his divinity, or vice versa).

That is not to say that the death of Jesus is not also important to an eco-Christian perspective. However, it is only important as a continuation of the Jesus story and not as an event that stands on its own, as if in some way separate from his life. To

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[23] Adrian B. Smith, *op. cit.*: 1996: 39-40.
[24] Anne Primavesi, *op. cit.*: 1991: 131.

see Jesus' death as such a continuation means having to interpret its significance in a different way. It means, essentially, a rejection of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement; a doctrine which in any case, according to Adrian Smith, comes from "the era when slaves were bought and sold and rulers had to be appeased", and which leaves us "dissatisfied as an explanation".[25]

Furthermore, the doctrine is contrary to some of the teachings of Jesus about the nature of God. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is in the parable of the prodigal son from the gospel of Luke (15:11-32). In this parable, one son turns his back on his father and takes his inheritance and squanders it in "dissolute living". Once he realises the error of his ways, he resolves to return to his father whatever the consequences. Verses 18-20 are particularly relevant as an insight into the nature of the father in the story:

> 'I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Here is a father who acts like many other human fathers would. As soon as his son comes back to him, he immediately forgives and accepts him. There is no demand for a price to be paid; the love of the father is unconditional. If, as seems likely, Jesus intended the father in this parable to represent God, then it would appear that Jesus' own teaching into the nature of God was such that the notion of

[25] Adrian B. Smith, *op. cit.*: 1996: 4.

substitutionary atonement is actually surplus to the requirements and demands of divine love. In the parable, reconciliation is brought about by the healing of a severed relationship through the power of love, without a price being paid.

It is the power of love that opens the way into an interpretation of the death of Jesus that would be in keeping with a truly ecological Christianity. Such a Christianity would not be able to accept the traditional doctrine of atonement for the reasons stated above, and particularly because the doctrine contains supernatural/unnatural elements, which as already noted, have no place in a truly ecological spirituality. Therefore, the death of Jesus on the cross would be seen as a supreme act of love on behalf of others, in accordance with the words of Jesus as recorded in John's gospel: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for others." (John 15:13).

In this interpretation, the life and death of Jesus are seen as continuous rather than separated. Jesus died as he had lived, in powerlessness and love, and for the sake of his people – the Jews (and particularly for the poor and the marginalised within the Jewish community). In Christian tradition the significance of this final act of love has already been widened out to have significance for all people – Jesus died for us all, so that we could all have fullness of life (i.e., life free from poverty, injustice, violence, and hate). It is surely legitimate, therefore, for an ecological spirituality to widen this still further and claim that Jesus died for the sake of all life, so that every living creature might be given the inherent value and respect due to it.

Sally McFague sees a further significance in the death of Jesus, one that has implications particularly for Christians in the rich nations of the world. She writes:

> Jesus' ministry to the oppressed led to his death on a cross. Solidarity with the oppressed is likely to end this way, as many of his loyal disciples over the centuries have discovered. This suggests a theology of the cross: reality has a cruciform shape. Jesus did not invent the idea that from death comes new life. We see it in nature.....Some must give that others might live. Raising the cruciform shape of reality as the central principle for human living is Jesus' contribution.[26]

In other words, McFague sees in the death of Jesus a symbol for sacrifice, the sacrifice those of us who have too much must make, so that those who currently have too little may have enough. The rich must suffer the death of their overabundance, so that the poor may share in life in all its fullness. McFague concludes:

> For affluent Christians this should mean a different understanding of abundance, one which embraces the contradictions of the cross: giving up one's life to find it, limitation and diminishment, sharing and giving – indeed, sacrifice.[27]

So the death of Jesus on the cross puts before us a powerful symbol of sacrifice, one which if followed by the rich would have a positive effect on the lives of the poor as well as on the environment of the Earth.

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[26] Sally McFague, *op. cit.*, 2000: 36.
[27] *ibid.*, 36.

Therefore, the death of Jesus can have a great deal of significance in an environmental theology and in the formulation of an ecological spirituality. Even though an ecological spirituality has to reject the first century sacrificial cult interpretation of the crucifixion, that does not mean that such a spirituality needs to reject the event altogether. Rather the death of Jesus on the cross can be reinterpreted in a way which is in keeping with a twenty-first century ecological crisis situation. And it can be shown to be a powerful symbol of sacrificial love in that context.

3.9: The Resurrection of Jesus

There is one further aspect of the story of Jesus of Nazareth that needs to be explored here, and that is his resurrection. Traditional Christian thought has used the gospel accounts of the empty tomb and the sightings of Jesus after his death to suggest a physical resurrection. However, what is preached in many an Easter Sunday service is something more akin to resuscitation than resurrection. It was this observation that led the former Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, to comment famously that "the Resurrection was clearly much more than just a conjuring trick with bones". What he was trying to convey was that the resurrection of Jesus was "much more than the reanimation of a corpse", rather it is "something spiritual and for eternity".[28] The fact that the Bishop got into so much trouble and was so criticised because of his comments only serves to illustrate that for many Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is just about the reanimation of a corpse. This is further attested to by the importance many people

[28] David Jenkins and Rebecca Jenkins, *Free To Believe*, London: BBC Books, 1991: 43.

put on the evidence of the empty tomb as a "proof" of the resurrection. If the resurrection is spiritual rather than physical, then the empty tomb is an irrelevance and proves nothing. It needs to be remembered that the writers of the gospels had an expectation of a physical resurrection. Matthew's gospel records the following incident in the narrative surrounding the death of Jesus:

> Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. (Matthew 27:50-53)

Given that kind of expectation on the part of the gospel writers, it is no surprise that they felt the need for an empty tomb and actual sightings of Jesus' reanimated body and recorded these in their accounts of the days after the death of Jesus.[29]

However, neither the empty tomb nor a physical resurrection, resuscitation or reanimation, has any place in an ecological Christianity.[30] The reason for this is once again concerned with natural laws. While it is true that modern medical science can resuscitate people even after their heart has stopped for some minutes, and does so regularly on the operating tables and in the emergency departments of our hospitals, the bodies of the dead do not come back to life after a period of days or longer. By then the natural processes of rigor mortis and decomposition

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[29] For a full examination of the expectations of the gospel writers and the influence those expectations had on the texts, see, Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1994.

[30] From my own experience of leading Bible Study Groups I have found that many churchgoers no longer have any belief in a physical resurrection but see resurrection in spiritual terms only.

have set in. As far as a truly ecological Christianity is concerned, the body of Jesus or any other person after death would simply eventually become the basic materials for other new forms of life. That is the only sense in which a physical resurrection can be accepted in ecological thinking.

Resurrection then becomes not resurrection of the dead, but resurrection from the dead – literally new life rising from the dust of the old. This, of course, has implications for notions of life after death, in the sense of our continued personal consciousness (whether purely spiritual or within some kind of resurrection body) beyond physical death, and this will be dealt with fully in the final chapter of this thesis. It also has implications for the resurrection of Jesus.

The most obvious of these is that the resurrection appearances do have to be put down to either some kind of collective hallucination or wish-fulfilment on the part of the disciples, or as a picturesque way of describing a real feeling that Jesus was still with them in an almost tangible sense. Alternatively, it could be that these stories originated with the writers of the gospels as proofs of their own belief that Jesus was still with them. Or perhaps, in the case of some of the appearances, they were originally stories about things Jesus did before his death that later became resurrection appearances as the stories were handed down and edited.

That is not to say that the disciples did not experience the presence of Jesus in some way after his death, or that Christians today cannot feel that Jesus is with them in a spiritual sense. Indeed one of the ways in which the resurrection is helpful is that it means that Jesus and his teaching and example are no longer tied

to a particular place and time. One of the implications for an ecological Christianity of the resurrection of Jesus is that the values and teachings seen in this man can be freed from all restrictions, including that of species. In other words, the resurrection gives sanction to the idea that the words and actions of Jesus can be widened to include the whole planet and all life upon it for all time.

The resurrection of Jesus can also be a strong symbol of hope. It can signify the hope that ecological disaster can be avoided and new life can flourish on this planet. More specifically, it can be seen as the promise that out of the cruciform, sacrificial living mentioned above, can come new life for the rich, the poor and the non-human as we embrace the values of love, justice, and peace, respect and compassion in our dealings with all people and all life.

It can be clearly illustrated, therefore, that Jesus of Nazareth can be central to an ecological spirituality. His life and teaching can engender in us values which, if applied to the human and non-human alike can make a real difference to the way we treat each other and the natural world. He can inspire us to believe that things can be very different, that the status quo can be challenged and new world-views can replace the prevailing ones. By his death, Jesus is able to be a symbol of sacrificial love that may well be strong enough to encourage in us the kind of *metanoia* necessary to build a more equitable world and live in a sustainable way for the good of the whole of spaceship Earth. And through his resurrection, he can give us the hope that our own sacrifice will lead to new life and a renewed future for this planet and everyone, every creature, every plant, and everything we share this tiny, but so precious, speck in the universe with.

Chapter Four: Beyond Stewardship - The Image of Christ.

4.1: Defining the term "Christ"

The word "Christ" comes from the Greek word *christos* and literally means 'the Anointed One'. It is important to remember that the term "Christ" is not the surname of Jesus but a title, which is why some commentators prefer to use Jesus *the* Christ[1] and why Paul in his epistles spoke of Christ Jesus. In the Septuagint, the word *christos* was used to translate the Hebrew word *mashiah*, or "Messiah". It may be helpful, therefore, to first consider more closely the Hebrew interpretations of the word, and the expectations that went with those interpretations, as we search for an eco-christology.

4.2: The Hebrew "Messiah"

Quite literally, the meaning of the term "messiah" is "the anointed". It was originally applied to the kings of Israel and Judea, who were inaugurated into their royal office by the public ritual of anointing. This act was clearly intended as both a religious and legal rite. Furthermore, it came to signify an empowering of the new king through the gift of God's spirit. This empowerment conferred upon the monarch the wisdom and strength he would need in order to fulfil his royal duties.[2]

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[1] See, for example, Adrian B. Smith, *The God Shift: Our Changing Perception of the Ultimate Mystery*, London: New Millennium, 1996: 170.
[2] For a fuller description of the history of the term "messiah", see for example, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, eds. R.J. Coggins & J.L. Holden, London: SCM, 1990: 441-445.

In later Judaism, particularly after the exile, this kind of ritual anointing was extended to the installing of high-priests as well as monarchs. It was also an idea that came to be applied to the prophetic office; for example, we read of the prophet Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me...." (Isaiah 61:1).[3] It is interesting to note that Jesus also chose to apply this passage to himself when teaching in the synagogue, as related in Luke 4:18.

In a sense, therefore, all prophets, high-priests, and kings were "messiahs" in their own right, as all were anointed and all were believed to have received the gift of God's spirit. However, the term did gradually come to have a more narrow meaning in Judaism and eventually became specifically linked with what was known as "the messianic hope". This hope centred around the future coming of a divinely appointed deliverer figure, or a kind of priest-king. The exact nature of this messiah differed considerably throughout Judaism, from a very politically-oriented "ideal" king figure to a more spiritual one. In essence it remained quite a fluid expectation and one open to various interpretations. The Jews were waiting for someone, and presumably hoped to know that someone when they came, but in general they had no precise information as to who this person would be or what they would be like.

The one exception to this unknown quality of the messiah was in the area of family descent. According to the second book of Samuel, the prophet Nathan uttered a promise from God to the king David which was as follows: "Your house

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[3] All Bible quotations are from *The New Revised Standard Version*, unless otherwise stated.

and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:16). As a result of this prophetic promise, Davidic descent came to be recognised as a primary qualification for any would-be future messiah.

The only other certainty in the minds of those who expected this messiah was that it would be a person (and given the historical context, a man), rather than an angel or a god or some other kind of supernatural being. This is one point at which an ecological spirituality could possibly interact with the Christ figure. More specifically, if Jesus is seen as nothing more than a man, no different in kind from any other human being, then many of the problems that he poses to eco-theology would vanish along with the unnatural/supernatural elements of the traditional Christian interpretation of him.

Furthermore, if Jesus is still seen as someone who brought a special insight into certain values (which we may wish to call "divine values"[4]), then his position as "deliverer" or "saviour", or even "redeemer", can remain intact. The values that Jesus espoused through his teaching and example, if they were extended to incorporate the whole of life rather than simply the human realm, could be seen as potentially able to bring about a deep ecological awareness and by extension a sustainable lifestyle on the part of humanity. In this way, the Christ figure, as seen in the person Jesus, would extend far beyond the limits of the human life of this one man, and would be the focus for the deliverance of humanity from the verge of extinction. The resulting change in the behaviour and lifestyle of the dominant

[4] We may wish to call them divine because they may be seen as the fundamental values of a creating God, whose life is at the centre of the universe and is the basis for all life.

species on the planet could also bring about the salvation of the world from the edge of ecological disaster. This would surely be enough to earn the title of "messiah" without the need to go beyond either the natural or the human realm.

4.3: Christ as 'fully divine'

However, from the beginnings of the Christian Church, the view of Christ as a purely human messiah has always been regarded as too limited. This is evident from the earliest writings of the newly emerging Christian community. The letters of Paul describe Christ as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:24) and even go so far as to equate Christ with God:

> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
> who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not regard equality with God
> as something to be exploited,
> but emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> being born in human likeness.
> And being found in human form,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death –
> even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

By the time the gospel of John was written towards the end of the first century C.E., this notion of the equality between Christ and God had been developed further. Using the image of the *Logos* or "Word", the writer of the prologue to

John's gospel claims that the Word (Christ) is God and indeed the agent of creation:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.....He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.....And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.....No-one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:1-3,10,14,18)

This assertion of equality between Christ and God gave the early Christian theologians something to think about, particularly as they were also concerned to emphasise the full humanity of Jesus. Therefore, notions like "docetism", in which Jesus was effectively thought of as God "dressed up as a man", were soon consigned to the realms of heresy. By the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E., those present felt able to assert that Christ was "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.....he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man".[5] However, even then the arguments over this dual nature of Christ did not cease and so in 451 C.E. the Council of Chalcedon sought to settle the matter once and for all. What they wrote down was rather long-winded but has been the orthodox Christian position ever since. They affirmed Jesus Christ as:

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[5] 'The Nicene Creed, as in *The Methodist Service Book*, Methodist Publishing House, 1975: B10.

> ....perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction of the natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person, and one substance, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.....[6]

The statement from Chalcedon appears to have put paid to the arguments, at least publicly, until recent times, but was that simply because no-one could understand enough of what it meant to argue against it? Or was it that it was actually no answer at all, just an over-long restatement of the original paradox? Alistair Kee makes the following comment:

> .....the name of Chalcedon has become synonymous with failure. After almost four centuries the best minds of the Church (some of them the ablest in the Roman Empire) could only agree to say that Jesus Christ was of two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. But that is no solution to the problem. It is simply the problem stated. Nor has any advance towards a solution been made in the remaining fifteen hundred years since then.[7]

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[6] As quoted in John Stacey, *Groundwork of Theology*, (Revised Edition), London: Epworth Press, 1984: 120.
[7] Alistair Kee, *The Way of Transcendence*, as quoted in Adrian B. Smith, *op. cit.*, 1996: 174.

Not only is this all very unsatisfactory from the point of view of any thinking person, even a committed Christian, but it is also problematical from the perspective of an environmental theology. As discussed in the previous chapter, anything that is supernatural or unnatural raises serious problems for a theology that is built around the natural. For Jesus of Nazareth to be effective as a focus for an ecological spirituality, he must be the same in kind as every other human being; surely that is what it means to be fully human in any case. The same has to be true of Jesus the Christ if he is to be a saviour or messiah figure in the more traditionally Hebrew understanding of the term. However, if Jesus Christ has two natures, human and divine, then, unless that can also be said of every other human being, he is of a different kind to everyone else. In order to maintain the dual nature of Christ, therefore, it would have to be said that he is unnatural or supernatural in some way and therefore problematical from an ecological perspective, because once again the laws of nature would have been brushed aside.

One possible solution to the problem is suggested by Denis Edwards who highlights the difference between human persons and divine persons; indeed he states that there is "an infinite difference between the two". Edwards goes on to say:

> There is need for a negative theology concerning the person of Sophia. We do not know much about such a divine person. What we do know, from the incarnation, is that this divine Person is of such a kind as not to be opposed to human personhood, but its fulfilment.....

> We need to understand Jesus as a fully human person, a specific and concrete and historically limited human being with a human center of consciousness and freedom. As a human being Jesus is a personal creature who is radically open to mystery and transcendence. This open aspect of human personality is determined definitively in Jesus by his unity with the Second Person of the Trinity, the divine Sophia. Jesus is a fully human person precisely in being the person of Sophia. In thinking about the incarnation in Wisdom categories, it is possible to think of Jesus' humanity, and his human personhood, flourishing in its profound unity with divine Wisdom.[8]

Certainly the language used here is much more up to date than that used in the pronouncement from the Council of Chalcedon, but does this actually go any way towards solving the paradox or is it simply yet another restatement of it? It is true that here we have a very strong case for the full humanity of Jesus, but it is unclear how this compares with the full humanity of every other human person. If the divine Sophia "is of such a kind as not to be opposed to human personhood, but its fulfilment", then is that a possibility for every human person, or is Jesus' humanity still seen as somehow different in kind to that of the rest of us? In other words, is the incarnation as understood by Wisdom categories a possibility in every person, or is it only possible in Jesus? Denis Edwards does not answer this question and so we are potentially left with the same problem as before.

However, there is one sentence in the above quotation which could lead into a solution which would be acceptable in an ecological understanding of Jesus Christ. The sentence reads: "As a human being Jesus is a personal creature who is

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[8] Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*, Homebush, NSW: St Pauls, 1995: 60-61.

radically open to mystery and transcendence." Taking this as a starting point, it could be argued that every human being is a personal creature open to mystery and transcendence; i.e. we are all able to have a sense of that which is much more than ourselves, however we may wish to describe it and whatever name we would wish to give it. But Jesus was "radically" open to mystery and transcendence. Although the same in kind as us, there was something about his nature that made him able to reflect and communicate this transcendence and mystery in a way most of us seem only able to aspire to. Yet all of us could potentially reach that same radical openness.

In this way, Jesus Christ once again becomes a legitimate focus for ecological spirituality. He becomes a truly human being in whom we see divine values reflected in an extraordinary way. This could be a way of interpreting Paul's description of Christ as "the image of the unseen God" (Colossians 1:15). Jesus is effectively an "icon" of God, in the sense that an icon is an image that points us to the divine. For an ecological Christology, Jesus is the human person in whom we see the nature of the divine reflected in sharpest focus; he is a window into the values of love and peace, compassion and justice which, although a part of our humanity, also transcend it. As such, he deserves the title 'the Christ' both in the sense of a human deliverer figure, and in the sense that he leads us to a knowledge of the transcendent Christ – the universal divine values, not confined to place or time. Rather than being of two natures, Jesus' human nature gives his followers special insight into divine nature and the divine nature of the Christ is seen in the values of the human person Jesus.

4.4: Christ as the eternal Second Person of the Trinity.

However, there is still more that has to be said concerning an ecological Christology, because we cannot ignore the place of Christ within the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The notion of equality between Jesus Christ and God gave the basis for a binary doctrine of the Godhead: God the Father and God the Son, both equal and eternal. However, as the early Christians also experienced God in the activity of the Holy Spirit, it was a trinitarian doctrine that was eventually developed by Christian theologians. The doctrine of the Trinity took over three hundred years to fully evolve and did so through many arguments and divisions. Nevertheless, it began to take its final shape following the Council of Nicea in 325 and was eventually written down in the Athanasian Creed between 381 and 428 C.E.:

> And the Catholick Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
> Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.....
> And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another;
> But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together: and co-equal.
> So that in all things, as is aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped.[9]

According to this doctrine, Christ is the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son, God the Son, equal to God the Father and eternally begotten by the Father. Trinitarian doctrine therefore also states that Christ is fully divine, God the

[9] 'The Creed of St Athanasius', as quoted in John Stacey, *op. cit.*, 1984: 279.

Son, and it was this Second Person of the Trinity that became incarnate, and became fully human, in the man Jesus of Nazareth. The questions of full humanity and full divinity have already been discussed above, but the question that still needs to be asked here is, does this image of Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity have anything to say to the environmental crisis and is it of any use in the formulation of a truly ecological Christian spirituality? Furthermore, given the words of the Athanasian Creed, which affirms the Trinity as Unity, it is necessary to answer this question with regard to the Triune God as a whole, rather than taking the Second Person in isolation.[10]

The first and perhaps most obvious problem from an ecological point of view is the language traditionally used in the trinitarian formula. Until recently the Trinity was always expressed as "Father, Son and Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost)". The first two of these are anthropocentric (and even androcentric) whilst the activity of the third has often been seen by Christians as being limited to within the human realm, and even within only certain individual human beings, i.e. those who are "saved". It could be argued, therefore, that the use of such language only reinforces the notion that the rest of nature is merely a backdrop to the divine/human drama. In addition, the Holy Spirit is also usually given the personal pronoun "he" in most Christian liturgy and writing, thus creating an exclusively male Trinity, immanent only in the human creation.

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[10] Whilst it is stated in almost every modern explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is still perhaps prudent to note here that the Latin word *persona*, though translated "person", does not have the same meaning as we give to the latter today. Whereas "person" is understood to mean an independent, self-conscious being in the fullest sense, *persona* was understood more along the lines of "mode of being" or "role" and was used to try to convey the threefold experience of one God (i.e. as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) rather than three separate fully independent persons. However, since "modalism" became regarded as a heresy, much western Christian theology has leant towards "person" with the result of often coming very close to "tri-theism".

In the light of the exclusive nature of traditional trinitarian language, many modern theologians have suggested alternatives to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit formula. Brian Wren, for example, suggests the model "Lover, Beloved and Mutual Friend", whilst Sally McFague uses the similar model "Mother, Lover and Friend".[11] However, both of these models retain the anthropocentric nature of the traditional model, although they are at least more gender-inclusive. Furthermore, neither of these two alternative models link the Trinity in any particular way to the environment or ecological concern and so are of only limited use in relation to an ecological spirituality.

Another alternative model comes from Adrian Hough, who suggests the formula "Gardener, Lover and Dancer". The first of these is seen as fitting the environmental need and is seen by Hough as "being rooted firmly in the biblical tradition". As evidence of this, he quotes the account of creation from Genesis which talks of God planting the garden of Eden, the vision in Isaiah of Israel as a well-watered garden, and Jesus' parables of the kingdom, in particular in chapter 15, verse 1, of John's Gospel in which Jesus says, "My Father is the gardener" (or vinegrower in NRSV).[12]

Hough uses the term "Lover" for the second person of the Trinity and explains that he means:

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[11] As quoted in Adrian Hough, *God is not Green: A Re-examination of Eco-Theology*, Leominster: Gracewing, 1997: 124-125.
[12] *ibid.*, 127.

> ....God as a questioning, challenging, self-giving and suffering lover. Questioning and challenging because he gives freedom and invites response, whilst at the same time asking of our motives and our aims; questioning whether our priorities and actions are in accord with his intentions for the creation. Self-giving and suffering, because He has expressed Himself in creation and because all our failures and disasters are inflicted, either directly or indirectly upon Him.[13]

The third person of the Trinity is given the title "Dancer" by Hough. He claims that using this idea "broadens the scope of the model and gives it an increased global perspective." Citing Hindu thought, Hough states that "God is the dancer and he therefore creates the dance. The dance, that is the creation, is different from the dancer, but also wholly dependent upon Him." He goes on to say:

> If we use the model of God the Dancer to refer to the third person of the Trinity, we can attempt to recover the idea of God indwelling the whole of creation. We can rediscover the idea that nature is sacred, not because of a plethora of polytheistic deities as in nature cults, but because it is all indwelt by the one God who created it. In this way we might also recover the reverence and respect for the natural world which was held by our ancestors..... The God who dances in creation reinforces his statement that the creation is good.[14]

The rediscovery of the sacredness of nature is vital to an ecological spirituality as is the notion that the Divine indwells the whole of creation. However, although Hough argues that there is a link between these things and the model of God the Dancer, I am not sure it is a link many people would easily make. Similarly, seeing the second person as Lover does not automatically lead on to the love of all

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[13] *ibid.*, 129.
[14] *ibid.*, 131-132.

life, human and non-human, as required by environmental concern. Finally, the image of God as Gardener is more closely akin to a stewardship theology than a deeply ecological one and this might well influence the other two aspects of this trinitarian model; especially given that Hough himself makes such links by talking of a Loving Gardener and a Dancing Gardener, a Gardening Lover and a Dancing Lover, a Gardening Dancer and a Loving Dancer. It is undoubtedly true that Hough makes these links to show the interchange between the three persons of the Trinity, but they nevertheless then seem to support the notion of stewardship, which, as shown already, has major shortcomings in the face of the ecological crisis we face. Nevertheless, this model is gender inclusive, in that gardeners, lovers, and dancers can be male or female, and it does go some way towards including environmental concern within a model of the Godhead.

There is one further model that is worth consideration, and that is one which is sometimes used as an alternative in worship services (certainly I have used it myself). This model uses the formula "Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer" to describe God. Not only is this gender inclusive, but it also can move us away from an anthropological reading of the Trinity in that it is less "person" orientated. Using the widest interpretation of this threefold image, God can be seen as Creator of all that is, Redeemer of the whole creation[15], and Sustainer of all life. The strength of this model from an ecological point of view, therefore, lies in its all-inclusive nature.

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[15] Redeeming here needs to be seen in the sense of a turning around from the present destruction of the environment to sustainability and enriching of creation, not in terms of the traditional fall/redemption drama. This redeeming will need to take place principally within humanity as we are the main agents of the destruction, but it will have salvific effects for the whole of the natural world.

However, this same strength lays the model open to criticism from a traditional Christian viewpoint on two counts. Firstly, it is argued that the language used can depersonalise God; and secondly, the use of modes of activity (creating, redeeming and sustaining) leads to a charge of modalism.[16] Yet it could be argued that this model comes closer to the original meaning of the Latin word *persona* than many of the others do, and it certainly steers us away from the ever-present danger of tri-theism.

This consideration of different models of the Trinity serves to illustrate the inadequacy of our language about God. Even using every word available to us, we will always fall short of describing the indescribable mystery of the Divine. When trying to do so using only three words in a trinitarian formula, the limitations are obvious. Any and every combination we suggest will inevitably have strengths and weaknesses and will appeal more to some than to others. Adrian Hough admits this of his own formula and tries to give it more appeal by combining it with the traditional one; thus coming up with a Trinity comprising "a Gardening-Father, a Loving-Son and a Dancing Spirit."[17] In the end, though, this is little more than playing with words and the joining of all the models we could think of would still not fully describe the reality of God.

Nevertheless, there is still more to say concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and its value or otherwise to an ecological theology. If we put aside for a moment the titles or names we would give to each *persona*, there is another aspect of the

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[16] Adrian Hough goes so far as to describe this model as "not true to Christian doctrine", *op. cit.*, 1997: 124.
[17] *ibid.*, 133.

doctrine to consider; that is the relationship between the three persons, the communion within the one God. Commenting on the Trinity, Thomas Berry states: "There exists in the Christian world.....this sense that the inner life of the divine is community."[18] The traditional understanding of this is spelt out by Leonardo Boff:

> The important thing to see is not each person by itself and for itself but the circularity that inherently enwraps one in the other, the ongoing play of relationships. The very words *Father, Son,* and *Holy Spirit* suggest this relational circularity. The Father exists only as the Father of the Son. The Son is ever the Son of the Father. And the Holy Spirit is the breath....of the Father and the Son.[19]

It is this circularity of relationships that gives the doctrine of the Trinity a value in environmental thinking, because it provides us with an image of the Divine that mirrors the web of relationships and interdependencies that are so vital to an ecological understanding of the universe. Leonardo Boff cites the words of St. Augustine as being of particular interest to ecological thinkers: "Each of the Divine Persons is in each of the others, and all are in each one, and each one is in all, and all are in all and all are only one."[20] This could easily be as much a description of our modern picture of the cosmos as it is of the trinitarian view of God. The similarity can be shown, for example, by a comparison with the words

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[18] Thomas Berry, C.P. in dialogue with Thomas Clark, S.J., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*, eds. Stephen Dunn, C.P. and Anne Lonergan, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991: 15.

[19] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997: 156. See also Denis Edwards, *op. cit.*, 1995: 115: "If we view relationships as the primary reality, then this means we can begin to see all of creation, the universe itself, the biosphere on Earth, individual ecosystems, a living tree, cell, or proton, as fundamentally relational and part of a network of interrelationships."

[20] Augustine, *De Trinitate* VI, 10, 12. As quoted in Boff, *op. cit.*, 1997: 156.

of Thomas Berry, as he describes his model of the Trinity as "differentiation, inner articulation, and communion":

> We experience the world as emergent diversification and differentiation; each particle has its own interiority. Every particle has its identifying inner structure, its inner being. In a sense, everything participates "in person", as it were, everything has its voice. Everything speaks itself and everything is receiving something from every other particle of the universe. So we get the communion of things. The volume of each atom is the volume of the universe (if you consider every atom is where its influence is being felt). Every atom is immediately influencing every other atom in the universe, no matter how distant, even if it is billions of billions of light years away. There is still the bonding. So the explanation of Trinity in our times, in light of the cosmological model, would be in terms of a principle of differentiation: the Father; the principle of interior articulation, the inner principle of things: the Son; and the Holy Spirit, the bonding, the holding together of things, the spirit of love, the *spiritus*, the inner spirit of reality.[21]

The doctrine of the Trinity can, therefore, be used in a way that is helpful to an ecological view of the universe and the Divine. As long as we have this cosmological understanding of the doctrine, the words or titles that are used for the three persons are open to some extent to what is meaningful within the situation in which the formula is being used. From the models discussed above, the formula "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer" is probably the closest to Thomas Berry's cosmological model because of its universal scope, but others could well be more suitable in certain circumstances.

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[21] Thomas Berry, *op. cit.*, 1991: 15-16.

Within this cosmological model of the Trinity the second person, the Son, is described as being "the principle of interior articulation, the inner principle of things". If this is the Christ within the cosmos, then how does this image fit in with our search for a truly ecological Christian spirituality?

4.5: The Cosmic Christ.

The notion of a cosmic dimension to Christ is not new in itself. Many who talk of the cosmic Christ use the words of Paul's letter to the Colossians as their starting point:

> (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together..... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15-17,18-20)

This passage, along with the nature miracles of the gospels, has been used particularly by stewardship theologians to put forward the idea that Christ embraces all things. This notion is then used to include the natural world within the scope of the traditional fall/redemption drama, so that Christ's saving action on the cross becomes more than just about the salvation of individual human souls

and is seen in the wider context of the salvation of all life on this planet and indeed of the entire cosmos.[22]

However, this kind of thinking still sees Christ as a predominantly human figure and salvation as firstly about humanity but with nature tagged on (cf. Romans 8:19: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God."). In addition, as it is only a widening of the traditional doctrines of fall and redemption, this approach continues to envisage this all happening within the bounds of human history or at the winding up of that history. If we wish to give Christ a truly cosmic dimension, then we need to move beyond even those boundaries.

Perhaps one way of doing this is to claim that Christ embodies the healing and liberating values of love, justice, peace, and compassion wherever they are experienced and without boundaries of any kind, even boundaries of time or space. In Christ there is no east or west, no Jew or Gentile, male or female, human or non-human, earthly or cosmic, etc. Love is love is love.... In such an image, all dualisms and hierarchies fade into nothingness, and Christ does indeed become "all in all". Sally McFague describes this cosmic Christ as being the "body of God shaped by the Christic paradigm". She goes on to explain:

> Even as the life-giving breath extends to all bodies in the universe, so also does the liberating, healing, and suffering love of God. The resurrected Christ is the cosmic Christ, the Christ freed from the body of Jesus of Nazareth, to be present in all bodies. The New Testament

[22] See, for example, Ian Bradley, *God is Green: Christianity and the Environment*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990: 74-89.

> appearance stories attest to the continuing empowerment of the Christic paradigm in the world: the liberating, inclusive love of God for all is alive in and through the entire cosmos.[23]

Christ in this sense is not a human being but a symbol of these values, wherever they can be experienced by life in all its variety and richness throughout all time and all space. We might wish to sum this up as the "Wisdom" (*Sophia*) of God, a concept which Christianity renamed the "Word" (*Logos*) of God, or the eternal Second Person of the Trinity.[24] Furthermore, given the salvific or redemptive properties of the values contained within this aspect of God, the term Christ can also legitimately be used. Christ is then truly universal and cosmic, as well as being found in the particular. Christ is truly immanent and transcendent, but can never be one or the other because they are a continuum.

In this Christology, the man Jesus can still be given the "surname" Christ, because, as we have seen above, he is both a window into these cosmic elements of God and the point at which his followers, Christians, see these values uniquely focussed in the human realm. These divine values, understood collectively as the Sophia/Logos, which have always existed in God and in the universe since its beginning, are seen as also being clearly incarnate in the human person, Jesus of Nazareth, as is illustrated by the first fourteen verses of the Gospel of John. Matthew Fox sees the connection between the cosmic Christ and the historical figure of Jesus as a necessary dialectic of time and space. He writes:

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[23] Sally McFague, "The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ", *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, London: Routledge, 1996: 286.
[24] For a full discussion of Jesus as the "Wisdom" of God, see Denis Edwards, *op. cit.*, 1995.

> A theology of the Cosmic Christ must be grounded in the historical Jesus, in his words, in his liberating deeds, in his life and orthopraxis. The Cosmic Christ is not a doctrine that is to be believed in and lived out *at the expense of the historical Jesus.*[25]

However, although the healing and redemptive aspects of the divine are seen by us as focused in a human person, this does not mean that they are only present in and for humanity. Part of the problem for an ecological understanding is that much incarnational theology of the past has narrowed the concept down to what has become known as "The Incarnation". In other words, the notion that God became incarnate just once, in one human being, for about thirty years, and that was that. In such a scheme, the rest of creation once again becomes merely a backdrop (and even the position of the rest of humanity is left open to question). Fortunately not all Christian thinkers have so limited a view of incarnation. For Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, for example, the significance of the Logos, or the Word, is quite literally a universal one:

> Without earthquake, or thunderclap: the flame has lit up the whole world from within. All things individually and collectively are penetrated and flooded by it, from the inmost core of the tiniest atom to the mighty sweep of the most universal laws of being: so naturally it has flooded every element, every energy, every connecting-link in the unity of our cosmos, that one might suppose the cosmos to have burst spontaneously into flame.
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> In the new humanity which is begotten today the Word prolongs the unending act of his own birth; and by virtue of his immersion in the

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[25] Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*, Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1989: 79.

> world's womb the greatest waters of the kingdom matter have, without even a ripple, been eluded with life..... Through your own incarnation, my God, all matter is henceforth incarnate.[26]

This kind of inclusive view of the incarnation of the Divine is much more relevant to an ecological spirituality because, as we have seen, such a spirituality requires that the liberating values that are the Christ have a much wider implication that in the purely human. It is of little use for us to love our human neighbour, if neither of us has a habitable environment in which to live. Human beings cannot survive in a vacuum. Therefore salvation, if it is to include the human race at all, must at least also include all life on our planet, and indeed all that makes life possible on the Earth. Such an inclusive view necessitates an extension of the scope of salvation to include the entire cosmos on the understanding that all things are interconnected. Hence, the values that are the Christ, the values that effect this salvation, have similarly to be applied to the whole universe; but they also have to be applied to the particular, and in particular to the ecological crisis that we face. Then the eco-Christ becomes the focus of an ecological Christian spirituality.

However, for a religion like Christianity that prides itself on being historical, this widening out of the scope of salvation has the potential to cause something of a problem. A fundamental re-orientation is once again needed on the part of much traditional Christian thinking. As Sally McFague points out:

> Geography, not history, is the ecological issue. Those in the Christian tradition who have become accustomed to thinking of reality in a

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[26] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, London: Wm Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1965: 23-24.

> temporal model – the beginning in creation; the middle in the incarnation, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ; and the end at the eschaton when God shall bring about the fulfilment of all things – need to modify their thinking in a spatial direction. We need to ask where is this salvation occurring here and now, and what is the scope of this salvation?[27]

This reorientation, from the temporal to the spatial, also removes us from the view of creation as simply the backdrop to the redemption history of humanity; a view that has been so detrimental to our attitude to the environment, and indeed to Christianity. Creation is no longer in the background, but becomes the actual place of salvation. Salvation itself then comes to mean the health and well-being of all creatures and all creation. Central to that is the all-inclusive love of God, or the cosmic Christ, that liberates and heals throughout the whole cosmos. Given such an understanding, the eco-Christ is the point at which the cosmic Christ directly touches our ecology and our human ecological awareness; causing deep within us a potentially healing ecological concern.

None of this takes anything away from the divine love in and for humanity, nor from the salvation and liberation of human beings. What it does do, is to put human salvation on a more realistic and this-worldly plane, which is to the benefit both of humanity and all the other forms of life that we share this tiny planet with. It recognises that, as interconnected and interdependent parts of the cosmos, human salvation necessarily depends upon the salvation of the whole.

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[27] Sally McFague, *op. cit.*, 1996: 287. For the traditional view see, for example, Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications 1997: 204: "History is moving towards this climax with the glorious coming of Jesus Christ.....When he returns it will be obvious to all. History as we know it, will end."

4.6: Conclusion.

It can be clearly shown, therefore, that a truly ecological spirituality can also be Christian, if it has as a central strand the person of Jesus Christ and an attendant Christology. It is possible to illustrate that an ecological spirituality can indeed have both of these things. Jesus of Nazareth can be seen as a person who called upon his hearers to adopt a radically new world-view, a call which is becoming increasingly urgent as we face the environmental impact of our present world-view. Jesus called his followers to repentance and a change of heart, both of which are necessary now on the part of much of humanity, if we are to avoid a worsening ecological crisis.

Furthermore, Jesus taught, and has come to represent, the values of love, justice, peace, and compassion. These are the values which, if taken seriously in our dealings with all of humanity, would considerably change our world; and if extended to include all of non-human nature as well, could potentially bring liberation from unnecessary destruction for all life on this planet. Given his willingness to die on the cross rather than compromise on these values, Jesus of Nazareth is a worthy and legitimate spearhead for ecological thinking, action, and spirituality.

In addition, because of the liberating and healing qualities of the values embodied in Jesus, he can arguably be seen as the Christ in the Hebrew sense of a human deliverer figure. But those same divine values, if seen on a universal scale, lead on to an understanding of the cosmic Christ as the healing, liberating love of God

wherever that is experienced without boundaries of any kind. Through such an understanding, the scope of salvation can be widened to include the whole creation and so bring the non-human back into the framework of theology and spirituality. This does not detract from the human but does allow nature to share its rightful place alongside the human, rather than as merely a backdrop to human affairs. Then, where the redemptive and liberating values that are the cosmic Christ become those which focus our ecological awareness and concern, there we find the eco-Christ.

As humanity stares into the abyss of ecological disaster and quite possibly its own extinction, what is needed is a new utopia that takes seriously the crisis we currently face – a utopia that embraces new values, new ways of living, new world-views. This new meaning-structure needs to be more than a practical change in the way we live. It must also be a spiritual change that takes place at the very heart of our being. For the Christian, despite the inheritance of a tradition that has all too often neglected or even denigrated the non-human creation, it is nevertheless legitimate to have that search for a truly ecological spirituality spearheaded by, and focused on, Jesus and the Christ he points us to, even the eco-Christ.

Chapter 5: Resources for the Journey

5.1: Widening Our Horizons

> Once we realize that how we think of nature and ourselves in relation to the natural world is a convention, a way of seeing that is implicit in our culture but not absolute, not eternal, and not "natural", then we realize that change is possible.[1]

It is the contention of this thesis that change in the way we think of nature, the Divine, ourselves, and the relationships in-between is not only possible, but essential in the light of the current ecological crisis. Sally McFague makes the point that such change is indeed possible because the present way we think about these things is not some divine or eternal truth, but a culturally conditioned response to what our circumstances suggest is our relationship to the natural world, God, and one another.

Recognition of this fact liberates us from the constraints imposed by the mistaken belief that there is only one way to view the world (often reinforced by "divine sanction": that is the notion that a particular world-view is God-given or at the very least God-inspired). This in turn allows not only the freedom to consider completely new and different ways of thinking, but also to look at how other cultures and faiths have viewed the issues we encounter, and to consider whether there are any insights from these that may be of help in the formulation of new ideas and images. The task of this chapter is to do just that, and to discover what

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[1] Sally McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997: 7.

resources there are from outside the mainstream western Christian tradition that may be able to assist us on our journey towards the formulation of a truly ecological Christian spirituality.

What follows is not, therefore, a detailed look at the spiritualities or religions mentioned, exploring every aspect of each. Most major religions, as we have seen with Christianity, have doctrines and ideas that are negative in their view of nature and the non-human creation, but it is not within the focus of this thesis to go into those environmentally damaging facets. Rather, it is concerned only with those aspects that could be resources in engendering an ecological spirituality.

5.2: The Spiritualities of Indigenous Peoples

The Native North American Indians had (and still have where they are allowed to) an intimate relationship with their immediate environment. This relationship is both practical and spiritual, in that it induces in the people a respect for and an understanding of the ecology of their surroundings which leads to a sustainable way of life, and also accords a spiritual value to all that the people share the region with.

An example of this comes from the Kettle-Falls people who lived along the Columbia River. At a particular time of year they would refrain from using the river for washing or toiletry because the "salmon people" were spawning.[2] Here

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[2] See John A. Grim, "Native North American Worldviews and Ecology", *Worldviews and Ecology*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker & John A. Grim, London: Associated University Presses, 1993: 46.

we have an ecoconsciousness which on a practical level leads to the protection of the salmon spawning grounds and the salmon themselves, and on a spiritual level gives to the salmon the status of personhood and thus inherent value. Furthermore, the recognition of the personhood of the salmon also acknowledges that they, too, have spirits and can be part of the spiritual relationship between the non-human, the human, and the Divine. In the religious awareness of these Native peoples, the belief in the spiritual nature of life goes far beyond fish or even animals and is true for all other forms of life as well; as John Grim, writing about the Native North American Indians, points out:

> Countless examples can be adduced of the Native knowledge of herbs, plants, trees, and fungi which were not simply understood as material techniques but as interactions with living, spiritually empowered beings.[3]

The belief that all life forms are spiritually empowered beings in their own right allows all the interactions between the people and non-human nature to be sacred relationships. Chief Seathl of the Suquamish tribe said in a speech in 1855: "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people."[4] This sacredness gives the relationship a special quality and mutuality which ensures a respect for all life and encourages sustainable living. For example, plants and animals that are used for food are seen as sacrificing their bodies so that humans can eat and live. To reciprocate, the humans make sacrifices themselves, through fasts or abstaining

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[3] *ibid.*, 47.
[4] *The Great Chief Sends Word: Chief Seathl's Testament*, Leicester: St Bernard's Press, 1994: 4.

from certain types of food at particular times, in order to conserve other life forms.

The reciprocity of this relationship illustrates the kinship that the Native peoples feel exists between themselves and the other creatures and plants that they share their lives with. Again in the words of Chief Seathl: "We are part of the earth and the earth is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers....all belong to the same family."[5] This notion of kinship also leads to a belief in the equality of all life and a deep relationship with the whole environment, both of which are seen as not only of importance for the present generation but also for future generations. This was clearly stated in an address by Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation, delivered at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, U.S.A., on 5th November 1992:

> In the perception of my people.....all life is equal, and that includes the birds, animals, things that grow, things that swim. It is the Creator who presents the reality. As you read this by yourself in your sovereignty and in your being, you are a manifestation of the creation. You are sovereign by the fact that you exist. This relationship demands respect for the equality of all life.....Absent from the political thinking in the United States, however, has been an understanding of the equality of all life and a perspective for nurturing future life. This respect for future life, in my people's understanding, demands that we look ahead. In all decision-making we consider: will this decision be to the benefit and welfare of the seventh generation? Now it is time for the indigenous peoples to speak about that which

[5] *ibid.*, 5.

> we have observed – exploitation of not only the people but also of the earth's resources without any regard for the seventh generation. Caring for the earth, then, calls for sovereign responsibility not simply to yourselves, but to your people, your earth, your seventh generation.[6]

It can be seen, therefore, that the spirituality of many indigenous peoples has an inherent ecological dimension that does not ignore the needs of humanity with regard to the use of natural resources, but neither does it reduce the natural world to a purely utilitarian level. Rather, it imbues all life with spirituality as well as seeing the fate of humanity as being intricately bound up with the fate of the whole earth:

> Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth. If people spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. This we know. The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.[7]

This notion of connectedness to the earth is not unique to the North American Indians but is reflected in the spirituality of other indigenous peoples as well. For example, Rob Cooper, who is of Maori descent, illustrates his close link with the land by claiming that he gets his spirituality "through the soles of his feet."[8]

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[6] As quoted in John A. Grim, *op. cit.*, 1993: 51.
[7] Chief Seathl, St Bernard Press, *op. cit.*, 1994: 9.
[8] This is a particularly intimate image, particularly given the claim of chiropodists and massage experts that different areas of our feet are connected to different parts of our body and that our whole body can be "reached" through the souls of our feet. Given this view, the image put forward by Cooper can be seen as a spiritual connection between the whole of his being and the earth.

Talking about the simple truth that "the world is the only home of humanity", Cooper states:

> This simple truth comes home to me every time I walk barefoot upon the earth..... Walking or standing barefoot upon the earth provides the conduit for my spiritual enrichment. To stand on the hills of my ancestors still fills my heart as it did when I was a child. There is something about it that inspires reverence. Gripping the earth, grass or field flowers with one's toes is extremely reinvigorating for the soul.[9]

For the Maori people there is a unity in creation which is much like the unity in a family or community. This notion of kinship is also reflected in the spirituality of other indigenous peoples. For example, the Aboriginal people of North America centre their spirituality around the idea of "relationship to the whole creation":

> We call the earth our mother and the animals are our brothers and sisters. Those parts of creation which biologists describe as inanimate we call our relatives. This naming of creation into our family is an imagery of substance, but it is more than that, because it describes a relationship of love and faithfulness between human persons and creation. This unity as creatures in the creation cannot be expressed exclusively, since it is related to the interdependence and connectedness of all life.[10]

Thus, there is no notion of the individual in the sense of one set apart from the whole, nor is there any doctrine of individual salvation. Rather the individual is an

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[9] Rob Cooper, "Through the Soles of My Feet: A Personal View of Creation", *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994: 209-210. This is an experience many people these days never have, as they walk on concrete and pavements in their designer footwear.

[10] Stan McKay, "An Aboriginal Perspective on the Integrity of Creation", Hallman, *op. cit.*, 1994: 214.

intimate part of the community, the family, the whole of the earth community and ultimately the entire creation. Therefore the relationship between the individual and the earth is also an intimate one. Every feature of the land, every hill, mountain, valley, stream and so on is known by name to show that each one matters, that each has an innate value. This also has the effect of placing "such natural features within the hearts and lives of our very existence." This in turn places the individual in a loving relationship with the earth and enables the good of the whole world to be put above the interests of each person. Salvation then becomes a matter for the entire community of life and beyond to the whole cosmos:

> In Maori belief, the earth is not to be conquered as if it were an enemy, but to be loved and co-operated with as if it were our mother. Of course, there will be conflicts of interest, but ultimately the earth will have its way, as it must. For above all else, it is the means of life for all. Therefore, no selfish individual, race, nation or class of people can command the earth, its seas or skies.[11]

This inclusive world-view has much to offer to the people of the rich nations of the North, many of whom have completely lost any feeling of connectedness to the earth. It is also vital to any link between faith and the environment and these ancient indigenous religions are a valuable resource in the formulation of an ecological spirituality.

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[11] Rob Cooper, *op. cit.*, 1994: 210. Again this is also true of other Aboriginal peoples: "Reference to the earth in our culture is not individualistic so as to indicate ownership. Our words indicate sharing and belonging to the earth." Stan McKay, *op. cit.*, 1994: 215. See also, J. Donald Hughes, "American Indian Ecology", *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, London: Routledge, 1996: 131-146.

5.3: Feminist and Ecofeminist Spirituality

It was the search for a more inclusive spirituality, theology, and religious practice that was part of the motivation behind the feminist critique of traditional Christianity. As the women's movement grew and feminist scholars began a systematic critique of religion, they quickly realised just how exclusive traditional religions, like Christianity, really were in their language, their imagery, their doctrines, and their practice. Women rightly felt excluded by the sexist and male-dominated language, and were actually excluded by the ecclesiastical rules from participating in any leadership roles. Not surprisingly, they felt a sense of injustice and began to openly criticise the established and accepted norms. In the "Introduction" to the book *Womanspirit Rising*, Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow state:

> Most of these criticisms originated in an often inarticulate sense of exclusion from traditional religious practice or theology. Women who felt called to be rabbis, priests, and ministers frequently found themselves barred from these vocations.....Catholic and Protestant women who wanted to serve communion were asked, instead, to serve church suppers. Women in every congregation heard phrases such as "God of our Fathers," "men of God," and the "brotherhood of man" preached from the pulpit.....
>
> Feminist criticism of religion began with the obvious. Explicit statements of female inferiority or subordination, exclusion of women from the ministry, and teachings on marriage and family were scrutinized and deplored.....Christian women questioned Paul's teaching that the wife must be subordinate to her husband as the church is to Christ, and they rejected the passage traditionally read at

> weddings that asked the wife to *obey* her husband but simply asked the husband to *love* his wife.[12]

However, whilst this was of itself bad enough, it soon became apparent that the obvious and explicit were only the tip of the iceberg as far as the thoroughly patriarchal nature of traditional established religion and ecclesiology was concerned. Lurking beneath the surface was the much larger realm of implicit and hitherto unquestioned assumptions.

Central to both the explicit and the implicit, certainly in the Christian tradition, was the language used to name and describe God.[13] This language was exclusively male, referring to God always as "he" and using titles like "Father", "King", and "Lord". This kind of language was used throughout the canonical books of the New Testament, in the official liturgy of the Church, and in the vast majority of the hymns sung in Christian worship. Furthermore, despite the insistence by theologians that God transcends sexuality, the use of such exclusively male language was deemed to be beyond question:

> How does human language name God? Which revealed words has the tradition canonized and how do the faithful verbally express and interpret their relationship with God? 'You shall not make yourself a graven image,' it was said. Yet more solid than stone, more resistant to iconoclasm than bronze, are the images cast in theological language and so engraved on our minds and throughout our prayers. We must

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[12] Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, "Introduction: Womanspirit Rising", *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, New York: Harper Collins, 1992: 3-4.

[13] See *ibid.*, 4: "The image of God as male was at once the most obvious and most subtle sexist influence in religion."

> always be inquiring whether the tendency of theological language towards immutability is wholly a healthy one.[14]

The feminist critique inspired exactly that inquiry, which began to open the way to a new richness of language and imagery concerning the Divine that was gender inclusive. This allowed for both female and male pronouns for God, as well as for titles like "Mother God" to complement the male image of "Father God". In addition, it led to the exploration of gender-neutral terms such as "Living God", and images of God as "Lover", "Friend", "Parent", etc. From a feminist perspective this inquiry enabled images of God to be more gender-balanced and allowed feminist theologians to picture God in ways that were more meaningful to women, and, indeed, to many men as well. From an ecological perspective, it opened up the whole debate about images of the Divine, paving the way for new descriptions and images that were more in keeping with an environmental approach to theology.

However, given the influence that established Christianity had exerted on the values of society, it was not enough simply to challenge or even change the titles for and images of God. In the religious mind those images and titles were more than mere words, they went beyond language and were the essence of God as far as human understanding could discern. Furthermore, they had led to a particular mindset or world-view that saw the male as superior to the female. What is more, this superiority was regarded as being divinely sanctioned and therefore not to be questioned. As Mary Daly states:

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[14] Gail Ramshaw, "The Gender of God", *Feminist Theology: A Reader* ed. Ann Loades, London: SPCK, 1993: 168. See also, Dorothee Soelle, *Theology for Sceptics*, London: Mowbray, 1995:19-25.

The Judaic-Christian tradition has served to legitimate sexually imbalanced patriarchal society. Thus, for example, the image of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God, in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male dominated..... What is happening, of course, is the familiar mechanism by which the images and values of a given society are projected into a realm of beliefs, which in turn justify the social infrastructure. The belief system becomes hardened and objectified, seeming to have an unchangeable independent existence and validity of its own. It resists social change that would rob it of its plausibility.[15]

Nevertheless, for feminist thinkers and theologians, religious and social change were both necessary if women were to gain equality with men in every sphere of life. From the starting point of religion, this could only be achieved through a paradigm shift in the prevailing theological ideology and in the resulting change in religious practice then influencing the wider society (in the same way as patriarchal religious practice had previously done). In order to bring about this paradigm shift, feminist theologians developed a methodology that included at least three different elements.

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[15] Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father", Christ and Plaskow, *op. cit.*, 1992: 54. This divinely-sanctioned hierarchy is clearly indicated in the New Testament: for example, I Corinthians 11: 3, 7-9: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife....For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man." (NRSV)

Ursula King, in her introduction to the book *Religion and Gender*, identifies these as different "dimensions" of "feminist critical awareness." Firstly, there is the "descriptive dimension", in which previously neglected texts and works are described "often with a minimum of critical analysis." Through this dimension, it is possible to "discern women's voices hidden in androcentric texts", "discover women's experiences" and "their contributions to the shaping of different religious traditions and spiritualities." Then there is the "negative-critical dimension", which includes a "deconstruction of the androcentric framework, perspectives and assumptions" that have influenced the texts and the theology of traditional religion. Thirdly, following on from this deconstruction, there is the "positive-critical dimension", in which "women undertake the reconstruction of experiences, insights and different elements of tradition" in order to make them more meaningful to women.[16]

Many of the writings of feminist theologians are characterised by these three elements, description, deconstruction and reconstruction, and a similar methodology is also useful in the field of environmental theology. However, it was the negative-critical dimension, in particular, that provided a new insight which encouraged one branch of feminist thought to look more closely at the plight of nature at the hands of traditional Christianity.

This insight came through the deconstruction of the dualisms that have informed much of Christian theology and doctrine in the past. "Dualism" is described as "that view which seeks to explain the world by the assumption of two radically

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[16] Ursula King, "Introduction: Gender and the Study of Religion", *Religion and Gender*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995: 27-28.

independent and absolute elements."[17] The embracing of this view by early Christian thinkers led to the development of many dualisms within the new religion, none of which were seriously challenged until the critical analysis of feminist theology.

Fundamental to the Christian dualistic view of the universe, is the God/Satan dualism. From this, all the other dualisms flow: good/evil, male/female (man/woman), spirit/matter, man/nature (human/non-human), subject/object, and so on. In each of these dualisms there is an inherent hierarchy, with the first part seen as normative and superior, whilst the second part is regarded as in some way defective and inferior. Under such an understanding, God, good, male, and spirit, all appear on the side of superiority; whereas Satan, evil, female, matter, and nature are all inferior. Furthermore, only men are subjects, while women appear in the same list as objects, not to mention evil and the Devil.

These dualisms can, therefore, be a very powerful tool in the justification of male dominated religion and the subordination of women. Grace Jantzen, writing about the dualism God/World, comments that this particular dualism

> ..... was itself constructed as a theological justification for patriarchy. The dominant group of ruling class males constructed a world-view which set them apart as normative humanity, over against the "other" – women, other races, the poor, the earth – and then fashioned in their own image a God of ultimate value, power, and rationality over

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[17] *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, ed. A.M. Macdonald, Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers Ltd, 1975: 399.

> against the disvalue, passivity and irrationality of the opposite side of the duality.[18]

The realisation of the power and implications of this dualistic world-view, led feminist theologians to challenge the whole structure of a traditional Christianity that had been based upon the hierarchical assumptions which were the foundation of such a view. It also led to many women feeling an understandable association with, and affinity for, others who appeared on the same side of this duality as they did. For some, particularly in the nations of the South, this meant an identification with the poor, especially as many of the poorest people of the world are women. Out of this identification, feminist liberation theology has flourished.[19]

For other women, the association they concentrated more closely upon was between themselves and nature. Many women feel a particularly close bond with nature and the earth because they share in the ability to bring forth life and provide sustenance for new life. Ursula King comments that:

> earth and women are linked through their birthing activities, in weaving the fabric of life through continuous renewal, creating a multi-stranded web of which we are all a part.[20]

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[18] Grace Jantzen, "Healing our Brokenness: The Spirit and Creation", *The Ecumenical Review* 42, no.2 (1990): 137. As quoted in Eleanor Rae, *Women, the Earth, the Divine*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994: 32.

[19] See, for example: Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1991; *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, eds Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990; and *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King, London: SPCK, 1994.

[20] Ursula King, "Feminist and Eco-feminist Spirituality", *Guide to New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities*, ed. Christopher Partridge, Lion Publishing: in press. See also, Eleanor Rae, *op.cit.*, 1994: 27-28.

It is from this close feeling of association that ecofeminist theology was born, and it is this branch of feminist theology that is a particularly rich resource in the formulation of an ecological spirituality.[21]

The term "ecofeminism" was first coined in 1972 by the French feminist writer, Francoise d'Eaubonne,[22] and since then it has grown into a world-wide discipline that encompasses people of no faith as well as people from many different faiths and religious backgrounds. Some have rediscovered ancient Goddess religions, others have concentrated on the spiritualities of indigenous peoples, many have rejected traditional western religion, particularly Christianity, in favour of other, less androcentric faiths. All have valuable contributions to make to the field of ecological spirituality. However, it is necessary here to limit what follows to those ecofeminist theologians who have felt able to continue their links with Christianity.

These theologians have largely used the methodology outlined above; that of description, deconstruction and reconstruction. The descriptive dimension takes into account both an historical description of patriarchal religion and a description of the present ecological situation facing humanity. In the process, they have highlighted the links between the two, as well as pointing to the harmful separation of theology and science which has long prevented these links from

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[21] Given that women, the poor, and nature all appear on the "inferior" side of the duality, there is understandably a considerable overlap between feminist liberation theology and ecofeminist theology. See, Chung Hyun Kyung, "Ecology, Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality: Towards a Spirituality of Eco-Feminism", Hallman, *op. cit.*, 1994: 175-178; and *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996.

[22] Charlene Spretnak, "Critical and Constructive Contributions of Ecofeminism", Tucker and Grim, *op. cit.*, 1993: 181.

being recognised. Catharina Halkes describes this separation in terms of the gap between the understanding of "nature" and the concept of "creation":

> This has shaped a form of division of labour: the natural scientists keep themselves busy with nature and the theologians with creation in the context of salvation-history. The price of this division is the separation between creation and nature.[23]

The result of this separation is that creation is given value as the first act of salvation history (as in the creation narratives in the first two chapters of Genesis), whereas nature has no value and becomes merely the backdrop upon which this history is played out. Effectively this means that nature does not need to be taken into account by theology or by the Church – a situation understood by many women who felt similarly ignored by both.

In order to attempt to rectify this situation, Christian ecofeminist writers call for the discarding of all hierarchies and dualisms from the religion and wider society (deconstruction), and their replacement by language and images that promote mutuality and interdependence (reconstruction). As Rosemary Radford Ruether states:

> In ecofeminist culture and ethic, mutual interdependency replaces the hierarchies of domination as the model of relationship between men and women, between human groups, and between humans and other beings. All racist, sexist, classist, cultural, and anthropocentric assumptions of the superiority of whites over black, males over

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[23] Catharina J.M. Halkes, *New Creation: Christian Feminism and the Renewal of the Earth*, London: SPCK, 1991: 80.

> females, managers over workers, humans over animals and plants, must be discarded.[24]

Such a radical shift in emphasis would have far-reaching implications for Christian theology and would open up the way for the exploration of new and inclusive views of salvation and being Church, which would include both women and nature. It is this inclusion of nature that adds to the insights of the feminist critique and brings the ecological perspective to the fore. Ursula King notes that:

> Eco-feminist spirituality shares many similar themes with feminist spirituality, but has a more explicit focus on ecological issues and a far stronger emphasis on women's connection with the earth and all forms of life.[25]

Ecofeminists do see a strong link between women and the earth and rightly identify the oppression of both as a major cause of the present ecological crisis. Many ecofeminists also see a further connection between the way the Christian religion has traditionally viewed and treated women and nature and its inability to now change radically enough to really become relevant to that crisis. However, not all have given up on Christianity altogether, and those who have remained within the religion still hope that their critique will bring about a fundamental change in the traditional western Christian world-view. Consequently, their work is a crucial resource in the search for a truly ecological Christian spirituality that seeks to do the same.

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[24] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature", Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, 1996: 330.
[25] Ursula King, "Feminist and Eco-feminist Spirituality", *Guide to New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities*, ed. Christopher Partridge, Lion Publishing: in press.

5.4: Eastern Religions

When we consider the various eastern religions, our minds probably naturally think of Buddhism as being perhaps the most environmentally-friendly among them, because of its popular association with notions of peace and harmony. Certainly, Buddhism does have much to commend it in terms of engendering an ecological awareness and spirituality. Buddhists have a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, meaning that everything is inseparable and interdependent. The ecologically damaging doctrine of individualism that has characterised much of traditional Christianity is, therefore, not present within Buddhism.

> In his own lifetime the Buddha came to understand that the notion that one exists as an isolated entity is an illusion. All things are interrelated; we are interconnected and do not have autonomous existence. Buddha said, 'This is because that is; this is not because that is not; this is born because that is born; this dies because that dies'. The health of the whole is inseparable linked with the health of the parts, and the health of the parts is inseparable linked with the whole.[26]

The result of this inseparability of all things leads Buddhists to the realisation that that it is the existence of the whole that is of paramount importance and that the existence of one individual is no more important that the existence of any other

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[26] From "The Windsor Statements: Buddhism", written and edited by Kevin Fossey, Somdech Preah Maha Ghosananda, His Excellency Sri Kushok Bakula, and Venerable Nhem Kim Tong, *Holy Ground: The Guide to Faith and Ecology*, eds. Jo Edwards and Martin Palmer, Northamptonshire: Pilkington Press, 1997: 59. The Windsor Statements are declarations by the representatives of eight religions – Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs – about their faith and ecology, made at a Summit of Religions and Conservation, held at Windsor Castle in 1995.

individual. The value of this realisation is that it moves us away from any response to the current ecological crisis that is "merely motivated by the narrow confines of human self-interests",[27] which we saw was largely the case within the stewardship approach. Rather, it leads to a respect for all life and a commitment to living simply so as to do as little harm as possible to the environment around us. Furthermore, as with the spiritualities of many indigenous peoples, the feeling of interconnectedness can give rise to the notion of familial or kinship relationships between humans and other forms of life and the treating of nature as a friend:

> Once we treat nature as our friend, to cherish it, then we can see the need to change from the attitude of dominating nature to an attitude of working with nature – we are an intrinsic part of all existence rather than seeing ourselves as in control of it.[28]

Buddhism sees nature as a friend, as a teacher, as a spiritual force, and as a way of life. And the way of life that Buddhism itself teaches "takes us away from the ethos of the individual and its bondage to materialism and consumerism" (all of which are harmful to the environment) and moves us on to "inner peace" and being "at peace" with everything around us. This in turn encourages non-violence and simple-living, both of which are necessary if we are to avoid further harm to the ecology of this planet.[29]

One other helpful contribution that Buddhism can make to the formulation of an ecological spirituality, is the realisation that "all things are impermanent, having

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[27] See Brian Brown, "Toward a Buddhist Ecological Cosmology", Tucker and Grim, *op. cit.*, 1993: 124.
[28] Edwards and Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1997: 61.
[29] *ibid.*, 63.

decay and dissolution as their natural condition."[30] This moves us away from the notion that death and decay are enemies and the result of sin, to a much more healthy recognition that these things are a necessary part of existence and even a positive part of the circle of life.

Other eastern religions also emphasise some of the same notions as Buddhism. The Baha'i faith, for example, puts a strong emphasis on the oneness of the whole creation and argues that it is only when the whole of humanity reflects this oneness, that we will be able to resolve the problems that are causing the present levels of environmental destruction. Baha'is envision a global society and a notion of "world citizenship" as being the ultimate aim of the whole of humanity, leading to a commitment to the whole of creation.[31] Again this encourages us away from the damaging selfishness of individualism.

The Hindu religion, too, encourages its followers to avoid the selfishness inherent in increasing individual material wants and instead to live simply, enjoying spiritual happiness and taking care not to disturb nature's balance. Once more there is the recognition of the interconnectedness of all things and the equality of all life:

> There is no life which is inferior. All lives enjoy the same importance in the Universe and all play their fixed roles. They are to function together and no link in the chain is to be lost. If some link is lost, the whole ecological balance would be disturbed. All kinds of life –

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[30] *ibid.*, 61.

[31] See, for example, Robert A. White, "A Baha'i Perspective on an Ecologically Sustainable Society", Tucker and Grim, *op. cit.*, 1993: 96-112, and "The Windsor Statements – The Baha'i Faith", issued by the Baha'i Office of the Environment, Edwards and Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1997: 51-56.

> insects, birds and animals – contribute towards the maintenance of ecological balance, but what is man's contribution towards this? He is an intelligent animal, therefore his contribution should be the biggest. But we find the absence of his contribution. On the other hand he is nullifying the benefits of the contributions made by other species of life.[32]

There is here an acknowledgement that it is humanity that is to blame for the situation we find ourselves in, and consequently a realisation that it is the responsibility of humanity to work to put things right. This can be done through education, by teaching people to unlearn the things they are doing which are causing harm to the relationship between human beings and the natural world. This education or "unlearning" should come through school and also through the family, the community and through religion.[33]

Hindus share the notion of kinship with all life, partly through their belief in reincarnation. This belief teaches them that they are all involved in countless cycles of births and deaths and progress through many different forms of life. Such a conviction warns them against treating any form of life with cruelty and leads them to an ethic of non-violence.

Hinduism also has a deep sense of the Divine within all things:

> Hinduism is a religion which is very near to nature. It asks its followers to see God in every object in the Universe. Worship of God

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[32] From "The Windsor Statements: Hinduism", based on papers by Dr Sheshagiri Rao, Swami Chidananda Sarasvati, Shrivatsa Goswami and Swami Vibudhesha Teertha, Edwards and Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1997: 75.
[33] *ibid.*, 78.

> in air, water, fire, Sun, Moon, Stars and Earth is specially recommended.....Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* says,
> 'I am pervading the Universe. All objects in the Universe rest on me as pearls on a garland.'[34]

This gives a much more powerful expression to the activity of God in the universe than the idea of God making all things. If God not only made, but also pervades all things, then when we harm anything then we are not simply hurting something that God made, but we are harming the Divine within that thing as well:

> From the Upanishads and later Vedantic formulations, all things with form are seen to be essentially not different from the universal consciousness, or ultimate reality; any thing with form can be an occasion to remember that Brahman which is beyond form. In the monistic Hindu model, the human order is seen as an extension of and utterly reliant upon the natural order. In the language of Vedanta, the Brahman is inseparable from its individual manifestations.....There is no fundamental difference between ourselves and others; both are undergirded by the common substrate known as Brahman. To violate another creature is to violate Brahman itself.[35]

This belief encourages the fostering of notions of responsible use of natural resources and harmonious relationships between different life forms. This is true also of Sikhism, which, like Hinduism, sees everything in creation as a manifestation of God, and which in its scripture "declares that the purpose of

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[34] *ibid.*, 74.
[35] Christopher Key Chapple, "Hindu Environmentalism: Traditional and Contemporary Resources", Tucker and Grim, *op. cit.*, 1993: 116.

human beings is to achieve a blissful state and be in harmony with the earth and all creation."[36]

Sikhism has another important contribution to make in the search for an ecological world-view, in that it challenges the dualism of spirit and matter. Rather than seeing the spiritual as something which is superior to the material and seeing the material world as only there for human use, Sikhs see spirit and matter as a unity. For them, "the chasm between the material and the spiritual is in the minds of humans only."[37]

Striving for an harmonious relationship between all living creatures is what characterises another of India's religions, that of the Jains. For them, "conscious love – the striving toward an harmonious coexistence with all beings – is the purposeful, soul-supportive, evolutionary instinct of nature." And once again, they place the most responsibility on humanity to make sure that this happens, because we "have the capability....to protect one another," and by that the Jains mean that we have a responsibility to "every living organism in the galaxy."[38]

Jains dismiss the idea of God as anthropomorphic and see nature as that which deserves their reverence. This leads them to see this world as something positive, rather than something that is full of sin and something to be endured until we go to the next world.

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[36] From "The Windsor Statements: Sikhism", compiled under the guidance of Sri Singh Sahib Manjit Sing Jathedar, Sri Akhal Takhat Sahib, Edwards and Palmer, *op.cit.* 1997: 111.
[37] *ibid.*, 113.
[38] Michael Tobias, "Jainism and Ecology: Views of Nature, Nonviolence, and Vegetarianism", Tucker and Grim, *op. cit.*, 1993: 139.

> To become a Jain, then, is to embrace this earth *as* heaven, not with any thought of escaping it or eschewing one's responsibility toward it, but in full affirmation of it – every organism, every connection, the whole evolving biosphere.[39]

Central to this positive attitude to the earth and to all life is the Jain ethos of *ahimsa*, which is the Sanskrit word for non-violence or non-interference. The followers of this religion practice *ahimsa* in all areas of their lives. They keep their consumption to a minimum in order to keep their interference to a minimum. They are all vegetarian so as to not cause the deaths of any animals. So intent are they on non-violence that they are committed to minimizing all violence, even buying sheep and cattle that are destined for slaughterhouses and keeping them in their own animal welfare centres where they are cared for until they die naturally. Furthermore, they renounce all professions that cause harm to animals or to other humans; and even those like the timber trade which cause harm to the environment.[40] The dedication to non-violence and non-interference in Jain spirituality is, therefore, lived out in practical ways in the lives of the adherents and so has a positive effect on the environment:

> Jainism is fundamentally a religion of ecology and has turned ecology into a religion. It has enabled Jains to create an environment-friendly value system and code of conduct. Because of the insistence on rationality in the Jain tradition, Jains are always ready and willing to look positively and with enthusiasm upon environmental causes. In India and abroad, they are in the forefront of bringing greater

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[39] *ibid.*, 139.
[40] *ibid.*, 141.

> awareness and putting into practice their cardinal principles on ecology.[41]

It is this close link between spirituality and praxis that is a vital part of any solution to the ecological problems facing us all today.

That link can also be strongly seen in the Chinese religion of Taoism. The *wu-wei* of Taoist teaching is the principle of non-interference and non-selfishness and teaches the followers of this religion to live in ways that are very plain and modest, to discard selfishness and the pursuit of fame, and not to struggle with others for personal gain in their material life. There is a recognition within Taoism that it is the opposite world-view – that of selfishness and material gain – that has contributed to the ecological crisis and 'unbalanced the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, and overstressed the power and influence of the human will'.[42]

To redress this imbalance, Taoists seek to live in a way that values simplicity and minimises personal desires. This then enables them to value nature for its own sake, rather than seeing it only in utilitarian terms:

> The natural world is not a resource to exploit but a complex of dynamic life processes to appreciate and respect. Harmony with nature rather than control in the ultimate Taoist goal. This tradition has certain affinities with contemporary movements in deep ecology which decry an overly anthropocentric position of human dominance

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[41] From "The Windsor Statements: Jainism", compiled by Dr L.M. Singhvi on behalf of the Institute of Jainology, Edwards and Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1997: 93.
[42] See "The Windsor Statements: Taoism", written by the China Taoist Association, Edwards and Palmer, *op. cit.* 1997: 126.

> over nature. Indeed, the Taoists, like the deep ecologists, would say that manipulation of nature will only lead to counterproductive results.[43]

Taoism, therefore, along with many of the other eastern religions, emphasises a spirituality which is lived out in such a way as to do the least harm possible to the natural world. This ideal, which is central to both an ecological world-view and environmental theology, illustrates the valuable contribution the resources of eastern faiths can make to the kind of Christian spirituality I am seeking to formulate.

5.5: Non-Western Christianity

So far this thesis has been concentrating on what is broadly known as traditional western Christianity; that is the form of Christianity which has developed mainly in Western Europe and North America. It would be wrong, however, to think that this is the only kind of Christianity in existence, although there are those who think it is the only true or pure form of the religion. In fact there are numerous different variations on the Christian theme throughout the world, all of which are legitimate in their own right and many of which come out of very different cultures and contexts to that which spawned the western version.

As a result, these variations have developed in different ways and some of them have a more positive attitude to the natural world because of the situation in which they have grown. It is impossible to give an exhaustive list of these here, so I have

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[43] Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Ecological Themes in Taoism and Confucianism", Tucker and Grim, *op. cit.*, 1993: 154.

concentrated on just three of the best known examples, from three different continents: Orthodox Christianity, Liberation Theology, and the African Earthkeeping Churches.

5.5.1: *Orthodox Christianity*

The Orthodox Church seeks to engender a positive attitude towards the natural world. It elevates nature out of the realms of the purely utilitarian by teaching that the natural order is both a sign and a sacrament of God. This higher view of the natural creation then translates itself into an improved relationship between the human and non-human. Furthermore, it promotes a realisation of the interrelations and kinship between the two:

> When we become sensitive to God's world around us, we grow more conscious also of God's world within us. Beginning to see nature as the work of God, we begin to see our own place as human beings within nature.[44]

This inclusiveness is important in Orthodoxy. Christ's creating, sustaining and saving activity is seen in universal terms and therefore nothing in creation is left out. Attempts to limit the realm of divine activity and salvation to human beings (or worse still only certain human beings) are resisted strongly:

> What we need is an ecological approach which conforms to the divine economy of infinite dimensions. Every time we propose "global

[44] From "The Windsor Statements: Christianity", compiled and endorsed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the World Council of Churches and the Vatican Franciscan Centre of Environmental Studies, Edwards and Palmer, *op. cit.*, 1997: 68.

> perspectives", we should also at the same time ask how inclusively global our global perspectives are. God's creation in its totality is the *oikos*, the home where we humans live as children of the Father Creator.[45]

The term, *oikos*, is very deliberate here, as it indicates an "organic" relationship with the house. It is "a living house in which every member experiences and mutually expresses the relationship" and where "deep feelings of love, affection, care and a sense of belonging and identity arise from such relationships." The image of the *oikos* therefore reflects the inter-related web of creation, where all things are in relationship with all other things. Taken on one level it recognises "that particles exist only as energy states in dynamic inter-relationships", while on the level of our lives as human beings it sees the whole world and everything in it as being such a living house. In this way it encourages us to develop and maintain deep feelings of love and care both for the whole and for all the parts which make up that whole.[46]

Again, there is a resistance to any attempts to limit the *oikos*. Using the Pauline symbolism of the body of Christ, there is criticism of those who reduce this image either by extreme spiritualization or by strong individualism. Rather, the Orthodox theologians would argue that "the totality of creation is the ultimate body" and that we should view the body of Christ not as a "collection of several "my body's"" but as "successive layers of "my body", starting with my immediate body layer to the farthest layer of material creation".[47] This indicates an

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[45] K.M. George, "Towards a Eucharistic Ecology", *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy*, ed. Gennadios Limouris, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990: 47.
[46] *ibid.*, 47.
[47] *ibid.*, 48.

inclusiveness on the part of Orthodox Christianity that is not often found in the western form of Christianity.

In addition, there is within the Orthodox Churches an understanding of how serious this current environmental crisis actually is, and a willingness to admit humanity's guilt in bringing about this tragic situation. There is also a call for all human beings to live more simply in order that the strain we now put on the natural world may be relieved. The commitment to all of these things is expressed in the document, "Orthodoxy and the Ecological Crisis", which was written in 1990:

> We must attempt to return to a proper relationship with the Creator AND the creation. This may well mean that just as a shepherd will in times of greatest hazard, lay down his life for his flock, so human beings may need to forego part of their wants and needs in order that the survival of the natural world can be assured. This is a new situation – a new challenge. It calls for humanity to bear some of the pain of creation as well as to enjoy and celebrate it. It calls first and foremost for repentance – but of an order not previously understood by many.[48]

This illustrates the need for a sacrificial relationship to the natural world on the part of humanity, rather than the present one of destructive power. It is time for us to give rather than keep on taking.

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[48] "Orthodoxy and the Ecological Crisis", 1990: 10-11. As quoted in Edwards and Palmer, *op. cit.* 1997: 69. See also, Milton B. Efthimiou, "Orthodoxy and the Ecological Crisis", *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman, Geneva: WCC Publications/ Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994: 92-95.

Although the Orthodox Churches still view all of this in terms of the traditional fall/redemption drama, and do see human beings as the stewards or managers of the *oikos*, there are nevertheless images and ideas here that affirm the importance and inherent value of the natural world and call for a more equal relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. These can be adapted for use in the formation of an ecological spirituality.

5.5.2: *Liberation Theology*

Equality of relationships, or rather the present stark inequality of relationships, is the driving force behind another branch of Christianity that has much to offer in the way of resources for our journey. As has already been illustrated, there is a link between poverty and environmental degradation, in that the poor are often forced into living in ways that are ecologically harmful simply to survive. Furthermore, the same kind of arrogant, domineering attitudes that have prevailed in the treatment of the non-human world by the richest sections of human society, have also characterised the treatment of the poor countries of the South by the affluent nations of the North. The poor and nature have both been seen not as subjects valuable in their own right, but as objects to be used and abused. It is little wonder, therefore, that the ethics and spirituality of liberation theology have valuable things to say to the ecological debate.

> Liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they start from two bleeding wounds. The wound of poverty breaks the social fabric of millions and millions of poor people around the world. The other wound, systematic assault on the Earth, breaks

> down the balance of the planet, which is under threat from the plundering of development as practiced by contemporary global societies. Both lines of reflection and practice have as their starting point a cry: the cry of the poor for life, freedom, and beauty (cf. Ex 3:7), and the cry of the Earth groaning under oppression (cf. Rom 8:22-23). Both seek liberation, a liberation of the poor by themselves as active subjects.....and a liberation of the Earth through a new covenant between it and human beings, in a brotherly and sisterly relationship....[49]

Having made this link between the oppression of the poor and the oppression of nature, liberation theology seeks to liberate both through a shift in the prevailing paradigm, which currently puts the interests of the rich section of humanity and their relentless pursuit of ever greater material wealth at the centre. Where liberation theology has made such a difference in the lives of the poor, particularly in Central and South America,[50] it has done so by shifting the starting point for theological reflection. Instead of starting from a set of ready-made doctrines or even from what has been revealed to date through the Christian tradition, liberation theology used as its starting point the cry of the oppressed themselves. It put the poor first in what has become known as the 'preferential option for the poor'. Instead of seeing the poor as the objects of benevolence (and therefore always dependent) as traditional Christianity had done, liberationists saw the poor as potentially the agents of their own liberation. In other words, instead of seeing

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[49] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997: 104.

[50] To compare with liberation theology from an Asian context see, for example, Choan-Seng Song, *Third Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979, or Masao Takenaka, *God is Rice: Asian Culture and Christian Faith*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986.

them as objects to be helped, liberation theology saw them as subjects who could help themselves.[51]

This "seeing" then becomes the first step in a fourfold methodology that typifies liberation theology. Having identified a new starting point, the next step is to reflect, to analyse in the light of faith. The oppression of the poor is seen as sin because it is borne out of injustice and so is contrary to a God of justice. Furthermore, the objectification of the poor denies their basic human dignity as children of God. The suffering of the poor becomes identified with the suffering of Christ and the liberation of the poor then becomes an imperative of salvation (seen collectively not individually).

The third step is perhaps the most important and that is the movement from reflection to "transformative action" (praxis).[52] In the case of the liberation of the poor, this means challenging the systems of injustice that perpetuate the oppression. It means transforming the relationships between people into those that "foster greater life and happiness due to living in participation and in a decent quality of life for all."

Finally, there is "celebration", the moment when the advances and achievements of the process can be enjoyed and given thanks for. However, this is not the end of the process, as celebration leads on to new insights and so the cycle begins again

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[51] Boff, *op. cit.* 1997: 108. See also, Carlos Mesters, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People", *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, eds. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsey, London: SPCK, 1993: 3-16.

[52] For the Biblical roots of this transformative action see, for example, Elsa Tamez, "The Scandalous Message of James: The Angle of Praxis", Gottwald and Horsey, *op. cit.* 1993: 531-540. See also *Faith and Praxis in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Ursula King, London: Cassell, 1998.

and further advances are made; ensuring that salvation always remains a dynamic progression and not a static end in itself.[53]

In acknowledging the link between the oppression of the poor and the oppression of the Earth, liberation theology has applied this same methodology to ecological salvation. The starting point then becomes the most threatened beings in creation – non-human life – and the survival of the Earth as a whole (seen as the being 'Gaia'):

> The supreme value is the preservation of planet Earth.....Such a way of looking shifts the central focus of all issues. The basic question is not the future of Christianity or of Christ's church. Nor is it the fate of the West. Rather, the basic question is what kind of future there will be for planet Earth.....[54]

This shift in starting point then affects the reflection that follows it. It asserts that, for example, "human beings were made for the universe – not vice versa." It widens the scope of liberation to "all human beings, rich and poor, because all are oppressed by a paradigm-abuse of the Earth" and beyond to all creation because of "the connectedness of all with all." In addition it needs all human beings to reflect on their place in the natural world so that "they realize that they are a large earthly family together with other species and to discover their way back to the community of the other living beings, the community of the planet and the cosmos."

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[53] Leonardo Boff, *op. cit.*, 1997: 109-110.
[54] *ibid.*, 113.

The transforming action that arises from this reflection will be what assures the sustainable future of planet Earth and all life upon it. As Leonardo Boff concludes:

> This will happen only through a non-consumerist type of cultural practice that is respectful of ecosystems, ushers in an economy of what is sufficient for all, and fosters the common good not only of humans but also of the other beings in creation.[55]

When that happens, it will really be a cause for celebration. The insights of liberation theology are a valuable resource in our search for a spirituality that may contribute to bringing about the kind of changes that would make such a way of living possible.

5.5.3: *African Earthkeeping Churches.*

The African Earthkeeping Churches have arisen out of the African Independent Churches (AICs) as a specific response to the destruction of the natural ecology of the African continent. The AICs already had a commitment to liberation theology as a result of the oppression suffered by the people under colonialism and other repressive regimes. It was, therefore, no great leap for them to extend this liberating praxis beyond the human to include the suffering earth that they saw all around them. In 1991, the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC) was formed.

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[55] *ibid.*, 113.

It is worth noting that these churches have not, in the first instance, written down any great theological statements as a foundation for their actions, nor have they produced vast amounts of environmental literature. Rather, what they have done is to look at what is needed in a practical sense to combat the destruction of their environment and then they have acted in appropriate ways, and incorporated these actions into their worship life and liturgy.

For example, one of the most environmentally destructive things that has happened in Africa has been the cutting down of the forests, leading to rapid loss of topsoil and spreading desertification. Therefore, the African Earthkeeping Churches have set themselves the task of "clothing the earth" with new trees. However, this is not simply seen as a matter of going out and placing saplings in the ground, rather the trees are planted as part of a liturgy of Holy Communion. In this way, the whole exercise becomes a part of a service of worship which takes seriously the guilt of humanity with regard to the destruction of the environment, as well as acknowledging the value of the trees and the sacred nature of the whole of creation.

In the liturgy, the saplings to be planted are referred to as "friends" and even as "brothers and sisters" of the communicants:

> I, the tree.....I am your friend.....
> I, the human being,
> your closest friend,
> have committed a serious offence.....
> I destroyed you, our friends.

So the seedlings brought here today
are the bodies of restoration.

You, tree, are my brother, my sister,
today I plant you in this soil.
I shall give you water for growth.
Have good roots
to keep the soil from eroding.
Have many leaves and fresh branches
so that we may breathe fresh air……[56]

For the African Earthkeeping Churches, having trees as our brothers and sisters does not only mean that they can be participants with us in worship, but also that they, along with the whole earth and all life upon it, are encompassed by the notion of salvation. The African notion of salvation has always had more to do with this life than "soul salvation and a futuristic eternal life for individual human beings" in an *other* world. Rather it has been about "human well-being in all sectors of life, achieved through healing in this existence." Now that salvation is extended to a Christian commitment to the healing of all creation, and "the testing ground for the quality of individual conversion and spirituality lies in the ministry of earthkeeping."[57]

The combined effect of the liturgy and the commitment to an environmental spirituality which leads to a praxis of environmental action is very powerful and does two things. Firstly, it lifts the natural world to a level of communication with human beings instead of only being there for human use and abuse. Secondly, it

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[56] M.L. Daneel, "African Independent Churches Face the Challenge of Environmental Ethics", *This Sacred Earth*, ed. R.S. Gottlieb, London: Routledge, 1996: 580-582.
[57] *ibid.*, 576.

brings environmental concern into the centre of church life and worship, instead of it being something that gets an occasional mention perhaps once or twice a year. Furthermore, although the African Earthkeeping Churches would see their role as one of stewards of creation, the kind of liturgy and ideas of salvation that they espouse go far beyond any western stewardship theology.

5.6: Celtic Christianity.

Celtic Christianity is western Christianity but with a distinct nature of its own. The Celts were very rural people who lived for the most part in fairly inhospitable environments in Ireland, Wales and Scotland. As a result, their lives were hard and every act of living was affected by the elements. However, this meant that the people developed a very close relationship with the natural environment around them. This close relationship was reflected in their religion, which was a religion of nature where every mountain, forest, lake and river was a sanctuary and every act of daily life had religious significance.

In the fifth century C.E., many of the Celts in Ireland were converted to Christianity through the work of St Patrick. During the sixth century, St Columba established a monastery on the Hebridean island of Iona, from where he spread Christianity among the Celts of Scotland. The Celtic Church was probably the first British Church to be recognised as an independent Church by Rome[58] and has always retained its own identity and spirituality. This is characterised by a

[58] See, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1995: 90. See also Robert A. Markus, "From Rome to the Barbarian Kingdoms (330-700)", *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 90.

profound sense of the immanence of God in the world which has been retained from the pre-Christian Celtic religion. Whereas elsewhere the traditional Christian doctrine of creation served to desacralize nature, this did not happen in Celtic Christianity which retained an awareness of a divine presence in all of creation.

Consequently, the Celtic tradition is far better able to respond positively to the present environmental crisis than much of western Christianity. It already has within its liturgy and writings many resources which it can now share with the wider Christian tradition, and which are helpful as we all seek to find a spirituality that embraces the ecological questions we face. David Adam, who has himself written many prayers which are valuable in promoting the inclusive Celtic way of viewing the world, makes the following comments:

> ....the Celtic Church....has a great deal to teach us about the unity of the world and the Divine Presence in it. We are all still close to nature, though many of us are unaware of it, just as many are unaware of its Creator.....The Celtic Church saw and reflected a glory which we seem to have lost from the earth. Because of this belief, they saw all things inter-related and interdependent. I believe we need to recapture that awareness.....We need, once again, to rediscover the precious links between all living things; that there is a unity at the very heart of our world, and it can be experienced by each of us. Basic to that unity is a combination of God-awareness and what the world now calls ecology.[59]

As we seek to rediscover the things David Adam speaks of, the Celtic community founded by St Columba on Iona also has much to offer. Through their Wild Goose

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[59] David Adam, *Tides and Seasons: Modern Prayers in the Celtic tradition*, London: SPCK, 1996: x-xii.

Publications, the Iona Community have produced much worship material that engenders a more inclusive and immanent spirituality in those participating in worship. Quite a lot of the material also shows an enlightened view of our relationship with the natural world. There is far too much material to reproduce here, so just one verse of a song will suffice as an example:

> Sing praise to God where grasses grow
> And flowers display their beauty,
> Where Nature weaves her myriad web
> Through love as much as duty.
> The seasons in their cycles speak
> Of earth's complete provision.
> Let nothing mock inherent good
> Nor treat it with derision.[60]

Songs of this sort typify the relationship Celtic Christianity sees between faith and creation and offer theological and liturgical resources for the journey to the kind of spirituality we are seeking.

5.7: Conclusion.

There are, of course, many other resources that may be helpful in the formulation of a truly ecological Christian spirituality, but it has not been the intention here to give an exhaustive description of them all. I have, for example, not discussed the position of Judaism and Islam concerning the environment. This is not because they have nothing to say to the ecological debate. On the contrary, Judaism has a

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[60] The Iona Community, "Sing Praise To God", *Love from Below: Wild Goose Songs*, vol.3, John Bell & Graham Maule, Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998: 70.

lot to say about the covenant between the Divine and all of creation,[61] as well as having many ecologically-sound religious laws about the treatment of animals and the land, as indeed does Islam. However, both religions also have these in common with Christianity and are not sufficiently different on these points to warrant individual inclusion when space is limited.

It has, therefore, been the intention of this chapter to show just how varied the resources are, which can aid the task of formulating an ecological spirituality. Indeed, they are almost limitless once we abandon a narrow exclusivity and widen our horizons. Many others sources of insight could be found and explored, including a whole group of religions known collectively as "Earth Religions". These are described as:

> .....any religion which has as its basic tenet that all life is sacred and connected, honouring nature as the embodiment of divinity. Its practices seek to bring the individual into harmony with the Earth, its natural cycles, and the rhythms of the universe as sources of spiritual wisdom and experience of union with the divine. Such religions oppose the idea that the world is to be subdued and its resources exploited.[62]

There are several aspects of this description that would seem to encourage the kind of spirituality that is truly ecological. However, those same aspects would cause many a traditional Christian to dismiss Earth Religions as hopelessly

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[61] For example, Genesis 9:13-15a: (God said) "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh."

[62] Carol E. Parrish-Harra, *The New Dictionary of Spiritual Thought*, Sparrow Hawk Press, 1994.

heretical. The aim of this thesis is nevertheless to bring the two more closely together. This chapter has illustrated the wealth of material and insights that can contribute to this journey. The next chapter seeks to take these insights and combine them with what has already been explored in Chapters Three and Four, and attempt to formulate a truly ecological Christian spirituality.

Chapter Six: The Formulation of a Truly Ecological Christian Spirituality

6.1: The process of formulation

As was shown in chapter one, no spirituality exists in a vacuum. Rather, every spirituality both arises out of certain aspects of the environment around it, whilst also informing, or giving rise to, other aspects. Often a person's spirituality will arise from the surroundings they grow up in or live in, and that spirituality will then influence the way that person then lives within those surroundings. People who live in a European or North American environment, for instance, will probably have a spirituality that is broadly along the lines of western Christianity, whereas those who have grown up in the poorest areas of South America are more likely to have a spirituality deriving from some kind of liberation theology. Women who have experienced the inequalities built into many religious and social aspects of life may well have a feminist spirituality; while those who have been influenced by eastern cultures may have a Hindu or Buddhist spirituality.

Of course, this is an obvious generalisation and there are many exceptions, particularly in the present day when vast numbers of us have access to a myriad of different influences through the multi-media and through increased travel opportunities. As a result, many people probably have a spirituality that is born from several different sources, including traditional religions, so-called New Age religions, and ancient religions. For some, the influences may change as their lives change, for others they may remain constant. Whatever the case, the fact is that a person's spirituality does not stand in splendid isolation. The same is true of a

particular type of spirituality. All spiritualities are a part of a much bigger picture: an interwoven part which makes no sense if taken out of its context. Ursula King comments that "there exists no single permanent spirituality, but only the living dynamic of different 'spiritualities' linked to particular times, places and cultures."[1]

The same is true of a truly ecological Christian spirituality. It, too, is part of an interconnected string of relationships. It arises out of a particular context, that of the ecological crisis as described in Chapter One. Furthermore, it is shaped by its place within a particular religion, Christianity, and by its time, the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is also influenced by the culture that surrounds it; which, in the case of what follows, is a northern European culture as seen from a white, male, clerical perspective.[2]

So, an ecological Christian spirituality is related to various things that feed into it, but the spirituality also feeds out to several other things. Principal among these is the change of heart, the *metanoia*, which is central to the solution to the present crisis. Leading on from that there is the praxis, the new way of living that is environmentally sound and ecologically sustainable. In addition, in terms at least of a church-based spirituality, there is a link with the liturgy of worship which should both express the spirituality and inform the way of life.

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[1] Ursula King, "Feminist and Eco-feminist Spirituality", *Guide to New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities*, ed. Christopher Partridge, Lion Publishing, in press.

[2] It follows, therefore, that there might be other truly ecological Christian spiritualities that could emerge from different cultures and from different groups of people, although all such spiritualities would probably share many aspects in common.

All of this means that the task of this chapter, the formulation of a truly ecological Christian spirituality, has to be about more than just the spirituality itself. Rather, it is about a process, or a procession of interrelated matters. The particular process followed below is fourfold: firstly, I will examine the theology that gives a foundation for the spirituality; I will then describe the spirituality itself; next I will look at the kind of liturgy that would arise from that spirituality; and finally I will suggest the way an ecological spirituality might be lived out, the practice or praxis of the spirituality.

6.2: Theology

So to begin with the kind of theology that could engender or be a foundation for a truly ecological spirituality. The first thing to note is that traditional western Christian theology has become a very narrow discipline within the churches. It speaks of a transcendent God who is principally concerned only with the salvation of humanity and even then not in a collective sense, but in the sense of each individual human being saved one at a time (individual salvation). Furthermore, only human beings are in the image of this God, and often by inference this God is in the image of a human being; usually an old man with a long white beard. From my own discussions with church groups on such issues as inclusive language, I have found that for many Christians, God is not only male but a man; an archetypal father-figure.

This theological legacy is confirmed in the minds of churchgoers by the fact that Jesus was a man. Jesus was God walking the earth and the incarnation had to take

place in a male human because God is male. It is inconceivable that God could become incarnate in a woman and totally out of the question that the Divine could be incarnate in any non-human creature.

All of which leads on to a very narrow concept of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is seen as something sent by Jesus after his ascension into heaven. It was sent first to the disciples at Pentecost and then to other people as they became believers in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Even today, the Holy Spirit is often regarded as only present in human beings, and then only in those human beings who are "saved".

This, then, is a picture of the kind of theology that exists among many church members in Britain today. While academic theology may have moved on for the most part to be at least more inclusive and more developed, grass roots theology has remained fairly static over recent decades. As far as I can tell, this is largely due to the reticence of church leaders, particularly preachers and ministers, when it comes to introducing their congregations and Bible study groups to new concepts and ideas. Yet for an ecological spirituality to bring about the desired change of heart in enough people to really make any beneficial environmental impact, it is precisely the grass-roots Christians who will need to embrace the radical shifts in theological thinking that such a spirituality requires.

This may appear to be an almost impossible task but my own experience actually suggests otherwise. Back in 1996, I led a small study group of ten people from the church where I was then in pastoral charge. The group was made up of people

who were all over the age of fifty and had been church members for many years. As I was just beginning my research into ecological spirituality at that point, I decided to introduce them to some of the issues I was studying myself. I found that they were very receptive to new ways of thinking and new ways of imaging traditional theological concepts. The group met once a month and after eighteen months I did a simple exercise with them to see if they had changed their own thinking on the image of God.

To carry out this exercise, I presented the members of the group with a list of traditional and new images taken from a wide variety of sources, including hymns, liturgies, poems, and theological books. In total there were forty-three different images of God. I then asked the group to spend a short time individually looking at the list and deciding which images were most meaningful to them and which they found the most unhelpful. Once they had done this we came back together and discussed each image in turn. The results were really quite amazing.

For a start, none of the group were happy with descriptions of God as omnipotent or omniscient, though they were happy with omnipresent and omni-benevolent. There was general agreement on images around a picture of God as love and as ultimate reality. People were also happy to see God as both transcendent and immanent but did not like any notion that separated the two. There was much disquiet about any attempts to image God as a human being (male or female) even to the point of rejecting the notion that God became man in Jesus, and certainly that Jesus was/is God. Other images that the group felt were unhelpful included ideas that God is immutable or impassable, as well as images of God as the

Supreme Being or King. Interestingly, they further rejected a God who is supernatural and a God who intervenes directly in human history. However, they were particularly keen on a God who indwells the whole creation and leads all creatures into the future from within. They saw nature as God's self-revelation and the physical universe as God's body.

Once we had finished discussing each image, we formed a collective image of God made from all those descriptions that the members of the group had found most helpful. This is the image of God as produced by 'The Friday Group', 1997:

> God is mystery, and is in all things, being the true essence of all things; the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being. All things also have their being in God. God is therefore in the world and the world is in God. God is the Spirit of the universe and the physical universe is God's body. God is the life of all that lives, indwelling all creatures, holding them in life, and leading them into the future. God also suffers in the suffering of all creatures and all creation, and rejoices in the joy of all. God is power; the power of love and of good, the great heart of our own hearts, the beyond in the midst of our lives. God is revealed in and through the natural world, in all that is true and just in humanity, and supremely in the person of Jesus Christ.

This exercise illustrates how grass-roots theology can be changed when people are offered alternatives. In just eighteen months, the members of this group (called 'The Friday Group' simply because it met on a Friday evening) had moved from the basic model of church theology as outlined at the beginning of this section, to a far more developed and more ecologically orientated model as shown above.

Since leading this group, I have introduced others to similar notions of the Divine, as well as using new images in worship. For the most part, the response has been positive and people have found the new concepts both helpful and meaningful, particularly in the context of the continuing environmental concerns. Grass-roots church theology can be changed, therefore, if people are offered alternative ways of thinking. So what kind of alternative theology should be offered to encourage an ecological spirituality?

Firstly, it needs to be a theology that dispenses with the stark dualisms and hierarchies that have characterised so much of traditional Christian thought to date. It is these dualisms and hierarchies, and particularly the combination of the two in hierarchical dualisms, that have caused the separation of transcendence and immanence, for example, and have seen the first of these as superior to the latter. In keeping with insights from ecofeminist writers, an ecological theology would instead speak of a continuity between transcendence and immanence, and even a cyclical relationship between the two. Charlene Spretnak comments that ecofeminists:

> .....appreciate the nature-based sense of the sacred as immanent in the earth, our bodies, and the entire cosmic community – rather than being located in some distant father-god far removed from "entanglement" with matter. The transcendent nature of creativity in the cosmos, or the divine, lies not above us but in the infinite complexity of the sacred whole that continues to unfold.[3]

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[3] Charlene Spretnak, "Critical and Constructive Contributions of Ecofeminism", *Worldviews and Ecology*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker & John A. Grim, London: Associated University Presses, 1993: 187.

In such an understanding transcendence is not supernatural but rather incorporates all that is natural. Furthermore, the cycle of immanence and transcendence centres around the Divine: the immanent God is the God that indwells all that is in its diversity; and the transcendent God is the God in which all that is exists in unity. The Creator is interrelated with every part of the creation and every part of the creation is interdependent with the Creator. This interdependence between God and the universe has its roots in the process theology of theologians like Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and John Cobb[4] and has culminated in what has become known as "panentheism". Kwok Pui-lan expresses the same notion in the following way:

> An ecological model does not project God away from the world and above human beings. God, human beings, nature are interdependent and inter-related, just like the three interconnected arrows of the familiar symbol for recycling. A dualistic perception of the world must give way to a correlative and holistic understanding, just as each point on the circle is related to the centre and to the other points.[5]

An ecotheology, therefore, releases God from the exile imposed by traditional theology that pushed God outside the natural realm, and brings the Divine back to the centre of the whole creation. In this theology, God can still be the personal centre of our lives, as long as we recognise that God is also the personal centre of all lives and indeed of all life. Far from being a reductionist view, this theology expresses a God who is intimately involved with every aspect of the universe, rather than stuck outside creation or at best concerned with only the human

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[4] For a description of the work of these theologians, see Paul Collins, *God's Earth: Religion as if it really mattered*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995: 131-138.
[5] Kwok Pui-lan, "Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity", *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman, Geneva: WCC Publications 1994: 109.

creation. Accordingly it is not just humanity but all things that are in the image of God and everything in creation is a revelation of the Divine.

This opens up the way for a much wider theology of the Holy Spirit, one which is more in line with the perceptions of the indigenous peoples. As illustrated in Chapter Five, they would see the Spirit of the Divine as present in all people (not just Christians), as present in all life (not only human life) and as present in all that is (including what we would call "inanimate objects", like rocks and mountains etc.). This is a far more exciting doctrine of the Holy Spirit than that which is often heard in the Christian churches.

Furthermore, it is one which has massive implications for the way we view and treat non-human nature and the environment. If the Spirit of God is present in all things, then everything becomes sacred and of value in and for itself. Every bit of creation, from the tiniest particle to the largest entity is literally shot through with the energy of God. This knowledge led the North American Indians to view the world around them with great awe and respect. The incorporation of such a doctrine of the Holy Spirit in an ecological Christianity would surely do the same within followers of that faith. Could this begin the process of *metanoia*?

Certainly it should lead us to a more responsible attitude towards our use of natural resources and our treatment of animals and so on. Reawakening our appreciation of the sacredness of all that is would deepen the sin of abuse of other species and wastefulness in our use of the Earth. Indeed, if the Holy Spirit indwells all things, then the unnecessary destruction of anything is sacrilege.

Furthermore, when we destroy something in creation, we destroy something of God; each time we cause the extinction of a plant or animal, we reduce not only the wonder of creation, but also the Creator.

This goes far beyond the notion of stewardship, where human beings "manage" nature in responsible ways. This is about a deep interrelationship between the human and the non-human creation and the Divine, so emphasising the kinship of all. It is about the kin-dom of God in a most profound sense; the sense in which all beings and all things are related by the divine energy that pulses through the whole universe. This is truly awe-inspiring and truly ecological. It is summed up well by Elizabeth A. Johnson:

> We need to appreciate all over again that the whole universe is a sacrament, vivified by the energy of the Creator Spirit present in all creation as its very animation. The Spirit effects the redemption of both languishing vines and broken-hearted merrymakers: that is, the Spirit's presence is for *all* species. We need to realize that the destruction of this vibrant, complex natural world is tantamount to sacrilege. And we need to fathom that the human species is embedded as an intrinsic, interdependent part of the magnificence of this universe, not as lords of the manor but kin in the community of life, charged with being sisters and brothers, friends and lovers, mothers and fathers, priests and prophets, cocreators and children of the earth that is God's good creation.[6]

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[6] Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition", *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, eds. Dieter T. Hessel & Rosemary Radford Ruether, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000: 18.

All of this fits in well with the first two verses of the Bible which show the Spirit of God as present in the creation right from the beginning (Genesis 1:1-2) but what are the implications for the events of Pentecost, which have become so central to the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit?

According to the traditional interpretation of those events, this was the moment when the disciples received the Holy Spirit for the first time and is often referred to as the coming of the Holy Spirit. This gives the impression that this was the time when the Spirit came down from above (from God), having presumably not been already here on Earth. How can this be reconciled with the belief that the Holy Spirit is always present in all people and all of creation?

The story of what happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost is recorded in Acts 2:1-4. The writer tells us that the disciples were all together in one place. We know from later in the chapter (v.15) that whatever happened in the house where the disciples were occurred before nine o'clock in the morning. It is likely that those present had been up all night, discussing the momentous events of the previous days and weeks. As they talked together, thinking back on all the things that Jesus had said and done, perhaps more and more things fell into place and made sense. Eventually, as morning approached, the disciples may have reached a point where suddenly everything made sense, and it was like fresh air blowing away the cobwebs in their minds. Rather than receiving the Holy Spirit at this particular moment, perhaps it was only now that they became fully aware of the Holy Spirit within them, even though that Spirit had always been there. Maybe it

was also at that time that they realised this was exactly what Jesus had been trying to tell them all along:

> Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For in fact the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21)[7]

It is, therefore, not difficult to reconcile the events of Pentecost with a more all-embracing theology of the Holy Spirit. However, there are other questions that need to be answered concerning the relationship between the theology of a God who indwells the whole creation and traditional Christian theology.

For example, if the Divine is incarnate in all things, what is so special about Jesus? Christian tradition has given us 'The Incarnation', a one-off special event; God incarnate in a man in first century Palestine. But if God is incarnate in every man, and every woman, every child, every animal, every plant, and so on, then there is no such thing as 'The Incarnation' in this narrow sense. Once again, though, the gulf is not as wide as it may at first appear. It is possible to believe in the universal incarnation of the Divine and to still see Jesus as special. For Christians, Jesus is the person in whom we see the incarnation most clearly revealed, most clearly focused in a human being (for Muslims the same would be true of Mohammed, for Buddhists it would be the Buddha). It is then through

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[7] Some translations (for example, New International Version, Good News Bible) have 'the kingdom of God is within you'.

Jesus that, like the first disciples, we come to a realisation of the Spirit of God within ourselves.[8]

Once we become more aware of this Spirit within, we are able to identify it also in other people and in the goodness and reality of the whole creation. Then, as discussed in Chapter Four, what we see in Jesus becomes the Christ in all things, the cosmic Christ, embracing the universal values of peace, and justice, and love. And when we make the connection between these values and the environmental problems we face, so that they become eco-justice, peace between all life and for all that lives, and love for all creatures and all creation, then the focus for our faith becomes the eco-Christ.

So far, therefore, we have an ecotheology that consists of a God who is transcendent in immanence and immanent in transcendence, a God in whom all things exist in unity and who exists in all things in diversity. We have a Holy Spirit that energises the whole creation and is present in all human and non-human life and in all that is. And we have an eco-Christ who embodies the universal values that make it possible for us to find a solution to the present crisis and move on to new ways of living and thinking. All of which fits neatly into the trinitarian model of God that has become the expectation of Christian theology. But is such a model the best one for an ecological Christian theology?

As discussed in chapter four, the notion of the Trinity does have the advantage of adding a relational aspect to the Divine which might not otherwise be there. There

[8] This is explained more fully in Chapter Three.

is a circularity in the relationships between the three persons and an interdependence, with no clear boundaries between the roles of each. But would that not also be true if there were more than three expressions of Divinity within the one God? Why limit it to three? In speaking of a God who indwells and energises the whole creation wouldn't it be better to use a multiform model that was not limited by number?

Take, for example, the trinitarian model put forward by Adrian Hough of "Gardener, Lover and Dancer." Hough himself admits the limitations of this model and suggests that we might combine the images, thus coming up with "a Loving Gardener and a Dancing Gardener; a Gardening Lover and a Dancing Lover; a Gardening Dancer and a Loving Dancer."[9] Already what we have here is effectively six aspects of the Divine without adding in descriptions of God as Creator and Redeemer and Sustainer and so on.

In her essay, "The Trinity and Human Experience: An Ecofeminist Approach", Ivone Gebara also affirms the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of its relational aspect, or "divine communion". However, throughout the essay Gebara talks of the interplay between unity and multiplicity. She states that:

> The Trinity brings multiplicity and the desire for unity into one single and unique movement, as if they were movements within the same breath.[10]

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[9] Adrian Hough, *God is not 'Green': A Re-examination of Eco-theology*, Leominster: Gracewing, 1997: 132. This model is examined in more detail in chapter four.

[10] Ivone Gebara, "The Trinity and Human Experience: An Ecofeminist Approach", *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996: 15.

Again, on trinitarian structure in the cosmos, she writes:

> By Trinitarian structure I mean the reality that constitutes the entire cosmos and all life forms, a reality marked at the same time by multiplicity and by unity, by the differences among all things and their interdependence.[11]

Several more times throughout the essay, Gebara uses the same formula of multiplicity and unity and finally comments on the universe as our body:

> Everything is our body, our Trinitarian body: it is a continual tension and communion of multiplicity and unity, all within the ecstatic and mysterious adventure of Life.[12]

Whilst I agree with much of what Ivone Gebara says in her essay, I am at a loss to understand why "multiplicity" should be limited to "three" when it refers to the Divine. I can see that Gebara is using the Trinity as a symbol of a God who is both a unity and a multiplicity and I can understand her desire to show that this God is a reflection of the reality of the universe, but I would still argue that such a God should be a true unity (in whom all things exist) and a true multiplicity (who exists in all things) not limited by the constraints of a trinitarian model.

Of course, such an assertion immediately lays one open to the criticism that any theology that is not explicitly trinitarian cannot properly be called a Christian theology. However, whilst I would accept that the doctrine of the Trinity has been

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[11] *ibid.* 16-17.
[12] *ibid.*, 22.

the guiding principle of Christian talk about God for around seventeen hundred years, I would argue that it is not absolutely necessary for a Christian theology to explicitly incorporate the doctrine, and that other models of God can and should be explored under the umbrella of Christianity. The doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the teachings of Jesus and was not fully formulated until about three hundred years after his death. Furthermore, it is in any case a human creation arising from male theologians who lived in a very different world to the one we now inhabit. As it is a human creation it is therefore not infallible. To always limit Christian theology to trinitarian boundaries is to limit the Christian view of God.

Having said all of that, I do accept that a trinitarian model for God can be a useful shorthand when expressing the unity and diversity of the Divine. I have also shown above that an ecotheology can be expressed in trinitarian terms. My argument is simply that the Trinity should not, indeed cannot, be used exclusively to describe God even within Christianity, if we are to fully grasp the awesome truth of the unity and multiplicity of the God who is in all things and who calls us to a truly ecological spirituality.

6.3: Spirituality

Throughout this thesis I have made the assertion that spirituality cannot be taken in isolation as if it were somehow separate from its context. I make no excuse for repeating that assertion again here because it is fundamental to the whole search for a truly ecological spirituality. Christian tradition has often tried to separate spirituality from the material world. Spirituality has been seen as something

internal to the individual and not linked to physical existence; it has been seen as being practiced through silent meditation rather than through day-to-day living; and it has been connected to the spiritual soul which can survive physical death and take its place in some kind of next life. Accordingly, spirituality has been disconnected from concern for this world and associated more with other-worldly pursuits, which have been considered superior in a dualistic world-view.

This is not so of an ecological spirituality. Rather an ecological spirituality is about the whole person; the whole of the relationship between each person and their immediate environment (social context); the whole of the relationship between each person and all other people; the whole of the relationship between each person and all other living beings; the whole of the relationship between each person and the whole living planet and universe; and the whole of the relationships between each person and the Divine centre of all things.

Kwok Pui-lan states that: "We now need to speak of a holistic, bio-philic and embodied spirituality."[13] However, to make this shift from a dualistic world-view which sees spirituality as apart from the material, to a fully embodied spirituality has very serious implications for much traditional Christian thought and doctrine.

In the first instance it means a move away from any form of individualism, including notions of individual salvation. If we are interrelated not just with each other but with all living beings and the whole living biosphere then salvation must be about the whole, or it is nothing more than the selfishness that has contributed

[13] Kwok Pui-lan, *op. cit.*, 1994: 110.

to the environmental destruction to date. Commenting on the twelfth chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Charles Cummings makes the following observations:

> St Paul uses the metaphor of the body of Christ to describe the Christian church. Each member has a part to play in the whole body, and the body depends upon the smooth functioning of all its members. What Paul says of the church can be extended to the totality of living beings on this planet. Humans and non-humans together form an organic, interdependent whole that exists in graceful balance. Humans may not say to dolphins or to any creature, "We have no need of you," any more than the eye can say to the ear, "I have no need of you."
>
> According to St Paul, each part of the whole is expected to show concern for all the others. "If one part is hurt, all the parts share its pain. And if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy" (1 Cor 12:26). The weakest parts of the system – the animals and plants – deserve to be valued by those who are greatest in dignity, human beings, because the weakest ones prove to be "the indispensable ones" (1 Cor 12:22). Without them we could not survive.[14]

Whilst I would question whether Cummings still wants to hang on to an implicit hierarchy of being in what he writes here, he does at least emphasise the interconnectedness of all life, including human life, and shows that the well-being (and salvation) of each part is dependent on the well-being of the whole.

In an ecological spirituality, therefore, every part of creation must be regarded as intrinsically valuable and any hierarchy of being must be abolished, so that our

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[14] Charles Cummings, *Eco-Spirituality: Toward a Reverent Life*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1991: 62.

spiritual focus is shifted away from the individual and even from humanity alone, towards the whole living planet. But it is not enough simply to shift our focus and then to sit back and meditate on our new-found equality with all life. Again in the words of Kwok Pui-lan, 'Instead of being passive and emotionless, this new spirituality must be passionate, erotic, and full of fire.'[15] In other words, an ecological spirituality needs to be an active one, one that passionately seeks the common good; that is the good not just of all humanity, but of all creatures and the whole creation.

This spirituality must fire us with the values of love and peace and justice and turn them into the universal eco-Christian values. This means that our love must extend far beyond our human neighbour and become a love of the birds of the air, the trees of the field, even the very ground we walk on. And "a love of" means more than an appreciation for, it means the kind of love that binds us as sisters and brothers together in the unity of creation. There is a precedent for this kind of kinship love in the Christian tradition in the writings of St Francis of Assisi, who called everything in nature his brothers and sisters and lived accordingly.[16] Sadly for Christianity as a whole, St Francis has proved to be the exception rather than the rule. Yet if Christianity is to become relevant to the environmental situation we face, his is the example we need to follow; as Charles Cummings notes:

> A new way of thinking.....is not enough without a corresponding feeling of kinship and love for our planet. Universal solidarity is fruitless without love. Planetary consciousness realizes in a loving

[15] Kwok Pui-lan, *op. cit.*, 1994: 110.
[16] For a full description of St Francis' spirituality and life, see Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997: 203-220.

> respectful way the solidarity of all people with the non-human community and with the air, the water, and the earth itself.[17]

Finding this kinship love is fundamental to an ecological spirituality, because only such deep feelings can engender in us the passion for all life that would mean us feeling the pain of the rainforests as they are felled, experiencing the joy of the birds as they sing to greet a new dawn, and being filled with a sense of awe at the sight of the dawn itself.

Only the deep kinship love can fire us with a desire for a new kind of justice which looks beyond the human. This is described as "a more inclusive "eco-justice" according to which we cannot repair human inequities without simultaneously attending to the prospering of the larger earth-community."[18] This may mean at times that the needs of non-human creation may have to come before the needs of human beings. Leonardo Boff sees this as an extension of the preferential option for the poor, with impoverished nature and the living planet Earth standing alongside the human poor.[19]

This wider concept of justice is also linked to a passion for peace that is essential in any ecological spirituality. According to Kwok Pui-lan, this peace "is not just the absence of war or conflict, but harmony, well-being and blissfulness because of just relationships."[20] Once more, these just relationships and this peace need to

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[17] Charles Cummings, *op. cit.*, 1991: 79.
[18] John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993: 98.
[19] Leonardo Boff, *op. cit.*, 1997: 113.
[20] Kwok Pui-lan, *op. cit.*, 1994: 110.

be spread across all species of life and the whole of the natural world, as well as throughout human society.

In all of these values, therefore, the starting point for an ecological spirituality is not the individual, not even the human race alone, but the whole earth community. This represents a paradigm shift in favour of the environment and all life on this planet. It comes out of a compassion for all life but also a realisation that this earth is our only home and the only home of a myriad of life-forms. This spirituality, having rejected the duality of spirit/matter, recognises that there is no separation between the two. This means that there is no separate spirit or soul that can live on beyond physical death. In this spirituality there is no personal afterlife and no other world. In the words of Melissa Raphael:

> The belief that spirit is more valuable to God than matter is ecologically dangerous. It can beguile us into thinking that we cannot become extinct because that bit of us which God cares about, the soul, cannot be destroyed even if the world is left to dereliction.[21]

This is probably the largest shift the traditional Christian spirituality needs to make to become truly ecological, and it may be that many would find it a step too far. However, I would argue that to keep hold of a belief in personal immortality and in another world is to put our own desires and fears above the needs of this earth and the life upon it. It is to continue to see ourselves as superior to all other life forms which are regarded by us to be soul-less. Furthermore, it is to cling onto the supernatural which, as has already been shown, is detrimental to the natural.

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[21] Melissa Raphael, "Doing Green Justice to God: Immanentism in Contemporary Feminist Spirituality", *Theology in Green*, Issue No. 5, January 1993: 40.

Sally McFague asks similar questions of Christianity, and comes to the same conclusion:

> Should Christians be "natural", perhaps even "super, natural"? Are we willing to give up our long allegiance to being "supernatural" and live *in* the earth and *for* the earth.....
>
> .....we will begin to get things right about the humans – world – God complex when we see ourselves as natural, as belonging to the earth utterly and completely, as well as super, natural, by responding to this earth...with love.[22]

An ecological spirituality must be passionate about this life and the future of all life on this earth. It must be realistic about our finitude along with that of all other biological species. It needs to have a positive attitude to life and to death. I have never been able to understand why Christianity has traditionally been so negative about death, especially given the belief in an afterlife. Death has been seen as the result of sin, as something to be overcome, as an enemy of humanity. And yet, without death there can be no new life, so why does a resurrection faith like Christianity have this negative attitude?[23]

For Christianity to be truly ecological it must be able to shed this fear of death and see death instead as an essential part of the eternal cycle of life. For there to be resurrection there must be death. This is revealed to us through the natural world. A flower must die for the seed to form and become the potential for new life. The

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[22] Sally McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997: 5-6.

[23] Of course all unnecessary or wasteful deaths, whether human or non-human, should be seen as negative and should be opposed, but this is not true of natural death.

autumn leaves must die and decay on the ground to give the nutrients for the new leaves to form in the spring. We must die, not so that we can enter into personal immortality, but so that the dust from which we are formed can return to the earth to become the foundation for new forms of life.

In this understanding we can realistically see death as not just an end but also a beginning. From our death comes resurrection to new forms of life. There is life after our death, but not a personal afterlife for our ego. A particularly symbolic way of illustrating this is through the planting of a tree above the place where our body is buried, or the scattering of our ashes around the roots of a rosebush.

This eternal cycle of life and death and new life is seen positively as a revelation of the ongoing creativity of the Divine by a non-dualistic spirituality and is expressed beautifully by Rosemary Radford Ruether:

> As we gaze into the void of our future extinguished self and dissolving substance, we encounter there the wellspring of life and creativity from which all things have sprung and into which they return, only to well up again in new forms. But we also know this as the great Thou, the personal center of the universal process, with which all the small centers of personal being dialogue in the conversation that continually creates and recreates the world. The small selves and the Great Self are finally one, for She bodies forth in us, as all the beings respond in the bodying forth of their diverse creative work that makes the world.
>
> The dialogue can become truncated. We can seek to grasp our ego centers of being in negation of others, proliferating our existence by diminishing that of others, and finally poisoning the wellspring of the

> life process itself. Or we can dance gracefully with our fellow beings, spinning out our creative work in such a way as to affirm theirs and they ours as well.
>
> Then, like bread tossed on the water, we can be confident that our creative work will be nourishing to the community of life, even as we relinquish our small self back into the great Self. Our final gesture, as we surrender ourself into the Matrix of life, then can become a prayer of ultimate trust: "Mother, into your hands I commend my spirit. Use me as you will in your infinite creativity."[24]

Through traditional Christianity's determination to perpetuate notions of personal immortality, we are in danger of "poisoning the well-spring of the life process itself." Only by accepting our own transience can we see ourselves as equal to and in solidarity with all other transient beings. Only by rejecting personal immortality in another world can we be totally committed to life in this world. This is not to lose hope but rather to see ourselves as part of a much larger whole; to see our lives as part of an eternal cycle of life, our being as part of an eternal continuity of being.[25]

Indeed, far from losing hope, an ecological spirituality can engender hope in the face of the present crisis. As people become more and more aware of the enormity of the environmental problems they can lose hope in traditional religions which seem to have nothing to say to the ecological situation. By contrast an ecological spirituality speaks directly to that situation and because it does so, it offers future

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[24] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993: 235.

[25] Throughout my time as a Methodist minister, I have had the privilege to spend time with many people as they are dying. Of them all, the one who had the most positive attitude was a lady who had this kind of belief. We read the passage from Rosemary Radford Ruether at her funeral.

hope within it; not some vague hope of another world, but hope for this world. An ecological spirituality is a spirituality of hope. Mary Grey writes:

> Living in hope says to us, 'There is a way out', even from the most dangerous and desperate situations.....
> .....places of intense suffering can become places where the very nature of hope is revealed – its vulnerability, yet its power to gather up the fragments of shattered community, shattered humanity, and devastated nature.[26]

By taking the other-worldly element out of resurrection and rooting it firmly in this earth, an ecological spirituality offers precisely this kind of hope. Mary Grey sees this kind of resurrection hope for the earth in the writings of the prophet Isaiah:

> The first resource given by the prophet is a resurrection story inclusive of the earth itself. Although the resurrection of Christ is at the heart of faith, yet contemporary understandings of resurrection are often individualised, personalised and spiritualised into another, post-mortem world. But Isaiah links the recovery, well-being and flourishing of people and all earth creatures in joyous celebration *now*. These texts are known and loved:
>
> The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
> the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
> like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
> and rejoice with joy and singing.
>
> (Isaiah 35:1-2a)[27]

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[26] Mary C. Grey, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the Twenty-first Century*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000: 3-4.
[27] *ibid.*, 50.

This, then, is where the eschatological hope lies in an ecological spirituality, not in some other world coming down out of heaven, but in a renewal of this earth through a turning away from the sin of ecological destruction, and living in a new way, reconciled to all creation and to the Divine within all things:

> The dynamics of God's promise can be interpreted as a new creation in which the world is restored to God through the cleansing of our present polluted/desecrated creation. 'Sin' could be reconceptualised less as an antagonism of human and divine wills than as a forgetting of the holiness of the created order, which includes other human beings. Ecology has shown us that human redemption (in an immanentist sense) can no longer be differentiated from the cleansing of nature from pollution and the regeneration of forests and seas. The redemption of history can no longer be imaged as solely the legal resolution of a history of treasons against the God-king or 'his' legal codes, but more as the divine joy of a return to a renewed creation.[28]

A truly ecological Christian spirituality, therefore, has to be firmly rooted in life on earth. It is not separate from our physical lives but is an integral part of our material existence. It extends the commands of Jesus by embracing all that is and engendering kinship love between humans and all life, leading to a passion for the values of eco-justice and peace; this is the *metanoia* that can change the world. This spirituality does not seek escape from the world but sees death as a positive partner to resurrection and rejoices in our transient part in the eternal web of life. It seeks hope in the here and now and looks forward to the time when this earth and all the relationships upon it will be healed, believing that to be the will of the

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[28] Melissa Raphael, *op. cit.*, 1993: 40-41.

God who indwells the whole universe and holds out the promise of renewed creation.

6.4: Liturgy

The next question that needs to be dealt with is how can this spirituality be translated into the practice that can turn the change of heart it engenders into concrete actions, which in turn bring health and well-being to all people and all life? In the context of a worshipping community the intermediary between belief and action can be liturgy. Mary Grey speaks of

> ...the power of liturgy to transform; where praise of creation, interwoven with prophetic lament at what we have lost and what we mourn, giving ourselves time to grieve the death of the forests and the pollution of air and soil, touches the wellsprings of our compassion and unleashes the power to transform, sowing the seeds of outrageous hope for the renewal of creation.[29]

However, for Christian liturgy to transform our thinking and change our hearts in an ecological context, it first needs to be transformed itself. The vast majority of the language and imagery currently used in church services reflects the patriarchal and hierarchical nature of traditional western Christianity. The titles given to God are almost exclusively male – Father, King, Lord – and the pronoun used is always "he", as it is for Christ and the Holy Spirit.

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[29] Mary C. Grey, *op. cit.*, 2000: 55.

There have in recent years been some moves to address this situation, most notably within the Methodist Church, which has at least debated the issue of inclusive language and even passed a resolution at its national Conference in support of the use of inclusive language in worship. The new "Methodist Worship Book" is the first book of set liturgies to appear since that resolution and it has to be said that the language is an improvement on the old Methodist Service Book. At least a large proportion of the titles for God are neutral titles, for example, Holy God, Gracious God, Faithful God, God of love.

There is even one reference to God as "our Mother" although it is balanced by God our Father which still takes precedence. The line in question appears in one of the liturgies for Holy Communion and it reads:

> God our Father and our Mother,
> we give you thanks and praise
> for all that you have made,
> for the stars in all their splendour
> and the world in all its wonder
> and for the glorious gift of human life.[30]

Although this is a step in the right direction, it does need to be put into context because this is the only place in the book where there is a reference to God as "our Mother". Nowhere does this image appear on its own (i.e. without God our Father), whereas God our Father appears frequently on its own throughout the liturgies.

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[30] *The Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999: 204.

Another positive step is that the male pronoun has been removed from the liturgies where it referred to God and the Holy Spirit. For example, in the opening responses in the prayer of thanksgiving, the previous Methodist service book had the couplet:

'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.'

In the new worship book, this has been revised to read:

'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.'

So there are some positive changes in these new liturgies, but it is still far short of the kind of transformation that is needed to embrace and promote a truly ecological spirituality. The hierarchies of being remain, both implicitly and explicitly; God remains 'Almighty', 'Ruler' or 'King of the universe'. The language continues to reflect an anthropocentric view of salvation and an eschatology that sees Christians overcoming death and living eternally in heaven.

Where creation is mentioned at all, it is always tied to humanity rather than taken in its own right. Even the 'Collect' prayer for Harvest thanksgiving (quoted in Chapter Two, p.69-70) puts the needs of humanity above those of nature. Nowhere is non-human nature or creation as a whole given precedence over humanity or even equality with human beings. Nowhere is there any suggestion

that our fate and the fate of the Earth are in any way connected. Nowhere is there a suggestion of kinship between human beings and the other beings we share this planet with. Furthermore, the image of God is always of a Deity who is outside or above creation, rather than present or revealed in and through the natural world; always transcendent, never immanent, except in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

While all the above examples concern the church I know best, the Methodist Church, I am quite confident that similar criticisms could be applied to other major denominations in this country. Certainly that is true of the Anglican liturgies I have seen. For example, the Collect prayer for a Rogation Day that appears in the Alternative Service Book once again reflects the anthropocentrism of so much of church liturgy. It reads as follows:

> Almighty God,
> you have provided the resources of the world
> to maintain the life of your children,
> and have so ordered our life
> that we are dependent upon each other.
> Bless all men in their daily work,
> and, as you have given us the knowledge to produce plenty,
> so give us the will to bring it within the reach of all;
> through Jesus Christ our Lord.[31]

The transforming of the liturgy as a whole, in respect of the mainstream churches, can therefore be shown to be a necessary prerequisite before truly ecological worship can take place within them, and play its part in an ecological spirituality.

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[31] *The Alternative Service Book*, various publishers, 1980: 884-885.

The most important part of this transformation concerns the place of nature in the liturgy. As illustrated in the sections on theology and spirituality, there must a shift in the starting point from which all these aspects of ecological religion evolve. The starting point must be the whole of the earth community, or the whole of creation, not the human creation. From that starting point, humanity can be considered as an interconnected, interrelated part of the whole, in kinship relationship with all that is. In addition, God must also be seen as an intimate part of this interrelationship, the divine energy within all creation, and the Christ seen wherever the divine values are evident within the universe.

This may appear to be a mammoth task but, as with the transforming of grass-roots theology, it can be done if people are offered alternative ways of expressing themselves through the liturgy of worship. I have experimented with the use of new images and language in leading services and for the most part these have been well received by the congregations involved (although I was once accused of inciting "tree-worship" when leading morning prayers at Wesley College).

Furthermore, while it may take time for new liturgies and prayers, new hymns and songs to be written and circulated, there are already resources available that can be used as they are or easily adapted for Christian ecological worship. Some of these come from within other faith communities, like this Hindu prayer from the *Atharvaveda*:

> Supreme Lord,
> Let there be peace in the sky and in the atmosphere,
> peace in the plant world and in the forests;

Let the cosmic powers be peaceful;
Let Brahma be peaceful;
Let there be undiluted and fulfilling peace everywhere.

Or this similar example from Buddhism:

May every creature abound in well-being and peace.
May every living being, weak or strong, the long and the small,
the short and the medium sized, the mean and the great,
May every living being, seen or unseen, those dwelling far off
those near by, those already born, those waiting to be born,
May all attain inward peace.[32]

With only slight adaptation, both of these prayers would be suitable for use in church. The language at least concentrates more on the whole creation and the peace that should be available to all life than the majority of Christian prayers do. As shown in Chapter Five, the resources that are available from other religions are valuable for an ecological spirituality and there is no reason why they should not be used within a worship service. In ecological thinking all things are interconnected, and that must by definition mean that all faiths are also interrelated and interdependent through the divine energy that pervades them all.

However, there are liturgical resources already present within Christianity as well. An example of this comes from the National Council of Churches of Christ and is entitled: "A Service of Worship: The Earth is the Lord's – A Liturgy of

[32] Both of these prayers are as quoted in K.C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis", *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994: 77.

Celebration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Commitment".[33] The service is designed to be used in response to the environmental crisis we are currently facing and includes three main elements. The first of these is an "Act of Confession", which begins:

> God's creation is being abused and violated.
> We as human beings often see ourselves as separate
> from creation, not woven into the web of life.
> The reference to having "dominion over the earth" is used
> to exploit and destroy the earth.
> As individuals and as societies, we become dependent on
> a lifestyle of limitless growth.
> We are quick to blame and judge others rather than
> accept responsibility for the part that we play
> in destroying our environment.
> We use more than our share of the earth's resources....
> Much of the world struggles for survival.....
> We squander resources on technologies of destruction.....
> We are killing the earth....
> We are killing the waters....
> We are killing the skies.....

The second element of the service is an Act of Thanksgiving, and this includes a thanksgiving for "the insights of the native brothers and sisters among us who draw on their tradition and teach us about the sacredness of all creation and how to live in kinship with it." Thanksgiving prayers are also said for those "who have

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[33] This liturgy is reprinted in full in, *This Sacred earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottleib, London: Routledge, 1996: 480-483. All the quotations from the service come from this source.

already begun to live their lives in ways that show caring for the earth, water, and the skies", as well as for "all the signs" that "point us toward new ways of living."

The service concludes with the third element, an Act of Commitment, in which the whole congregation say the following words:

> We commit ourselves anew to seeing the affliction of the earth, hearing its cry, and knowing its suffering. We commit ourselves to learning more about the changes that are needed. We commit ourselves to embarking on that long and difficult road toward life lived in harmony with all God's creation.

I do not know the theological background to this particular liturgy but I suspect it might be along the lines of the stewardship approach. Nevertheless, it is a very helpful service and does at least highlight some important aspects of ecological worship. These include an acknowledgement by the worshippers of their part in the destruction of the environment including a wish to truly repent of their actions; a thanksgiving for what we can learn from others about sustainable living; and a commitment to ecological practice. The liturgy does also contain a willingness to learn about "the sacredness of all creation and how to live in kinship with it", which goes beyond what is usually acceptable to stewardship theology. In addition, this kind of church service does bring the environmental situation into the context of worship and makes a connection between our faith and our ecological concern. To date, though, this kind of liturgy is rare and often difficult to find.

There are, however, other resources that can be used to raise the profile of the natural world within Christian worship. In the Methodist tradition we are particularly fond of singing and there are some hymns available that can bring the natural world into our services. There is even one in *Hymns and Psalms*, the hymn book most commonly used in Methodist churches today. The particular hymn in question is actually an Easter hymn, but it compares the new life of Christ with new life in the natural world. It was written by J.M.C. Crum and the first verse and chorus read:

> Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
> Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
> Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
>
> *Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*[34]

Unfortunately this is an isolated case within Methodist hymnody and it is usually necessary to find hymns from other sources to express ecological concern within the singing in worship. One particularly rich source is that of the hymn books of the Unitarian Church. There are several examples that could be given here but one will suffice, written by Kate Compston:

> Weaver God, Creator, sets life on the loom,
> Draws out threads of colour from primordial gloom.
> Wise in the designing, in the weaving deft;
> Love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

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[34] *Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1983. Hymn no. 204, written by J.M.C. Crum (1872-1958)

Called to be co-weavers, yet we break the thread
And may smash the shuttle and the loom, instead.
Careless and greedy, we deny by theft
Love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weaver God, great Spirit, may we see your face
Tapestried in trees, in waves and winds of space;
Tenderness teach us, lest we be bereft;
Love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weavers we are called, yet woven too we're born,
For the web is seamless; if we tear we're torn.
Gently may we live – that fragile earth be left;
Love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.[35]

Of course, hymns like these do not necessarily need to be sung in worship, they can be read as poetry and be just as effective. Indeed, poetry itself is an important part of liturgy and it is likely that there are more poems about the environment and nature available to those who lead worship than there are hymns.

There is as yet, however, not a great deal of liturgical material available that is truly ecological and much of what is available may need to be adapted to suit the local situation. There are some good resources from the Iona community as was illustrated in Chapter Five, but there is a desperate need for new liturgies, prayers, and hymns which reflect the ecological paradigm.

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[35] *Let Us Sing: More Hymns for Unitarians*, London: The Lindsey Press, 1994. Hymn no. 5, "Weaver God, Creator", written by Kate Compston. See also, *Hymns for Living*, London: The Lindsey Press, 1985, particularly the hymns in the sections on "A Better World" and "The Natural World".

This is particularly so when it comes to services in which that paradigm directly challenges previously unquestioned assumptions. Perhaps the most obvious example of this concerns funeral liturgies, which have always assumed the traditional Christian understanding of the resurrection of the dead. There are certainly no full liturgies that I am aware of, which do not include that traditional understanding. It is therefore necessary to use other resources to construct a service for the funeral of someone who has an ecological understanding of death and resurrection. There are a few such resources available. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, readings from books by ecological thinkers like Rosemary Radford Ruether can be helpful, as can poems and prayers from indigenous peoples. One that I have used on several occasions is known as "The Red Indian Burial Prayer":

> Do not stand at my grave and weep
> I am not there, I do not sleep.
> I am the thousand winds that blow.
> I am the diamond glints on snow.
> I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
> I am the gentle autumnal rain.
> When you waken in the morning hush,
> I am the soft uplifting rush
> Of quiet birds in circled flight.
> I am the soft stars that shine in the night.
> Do not stand at my grave and cry.
> I am not there, I did not die.[36]

The lack of specific and more general liturgies which encompass ecological thinking only serves to emphasise how little attention has been given by the

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[36] Origin unknown.

churches to this vital field of theology and spirituality, but it does at least allow those who are worship leaders to use their imagination and find innovative ways of incorporating nature back into Christian worship. One way of doing this is to bring things from nature into the church and using them in the service. There have always been flowers in churches although, as with the rest of nature, they are usually only used as a backdrop. Perhaps they could be made more central to the worship, even mentioned in the liturgy. Other things like fir cones and seed pods can be used to illustrate the potential for new life that is all around us.

Another idea is to bring a variety of stones to worship and give one to each member of the congregation. These can then be used in meditation and prayer, inviting people to examine the stone, hold it in their hand, close their eyes and roll the stone around their palm and so on. Liturgy does not have to be about words alone and this kind of exercise brings people into a tactile relationship with a part of the natural world.

Of course, relating nature and worship in a tactile sense does not necessarily mean taking something from nature into a church service. It can also be achieved by taking the church service out into nature. Nature walks can incorporate a liturgy of ecological pilgrimage, for example. A service of Holy Communion can be particularly relevant to an outdoor setting, especially if there is a fallen tree, tree stump, or rock available that can be used as a communion table. What better way is there to symbolise the sacrificial love of Christ for the whole creation?[37] There

[37] In this country, holding outdoor services is to lay oneself open to almost any kind of weather, but even that is a part of the natural world and rain can be incorporated into a liturgy just as easily as sunshine.

is a rich variety of imagery and symbolism within nature that can be used in liturgy once we take that our worship out of the confines of a church building.

Having services outdoors, bringing nature into the church, using poems, songs, stories that reflect ecological concern or illustrate the wonder of nature, are all ways of putting the non-human once more alongside the human in our Christian worship. When our starting point for church services becomes the whole of creation, then our worship will be the liturgy of all life and will express our kinship with all that is, and our interrelationship with the Divine. Perhaps then our worship will inspire within us a change of heart that will enable us to live out the values of the eco-Christ.

6.5: Practice

As with all of the sections in this chapter, there is no sharp defining line between the subject matter of each part. All sections concern interrelated aspects of an ecological spirituality which must be about the whole of life. This final section is, therefore, closely connected with the previous three and is in a sense an extension of the section on liturgy. Because, of course, liturgy is a part of the practice of a spirituality, and especially of an ecological spirituality which is more widely defined than some others. As we saw with the African Earthkeeping Churches, the liturgy and practice of their tree-planting Communion service were interwoven with one another. Worship, too, should be intimately bound up with everything we do every day of our lives, not just what we do on one particular day of the week.

What follows, therefore, is not to be seen as separate from what has already been discussed in this chapter, but rather as another aspect of the same; the fourth part of the one procession. In this section I want to concentrate on the living out of a truly ecological Christian spirituality in everyday life; that is outside of a structured worship environment. Both liturgy and practice constitute the way in which a spirituality is "seen" by the world, but practice is by far the most visible of the two, as well as being the way in which our spirituality has the most impact on the environment. The liturgy of the tree-planting Eucharist would have had very little ecological worth if it had not been accompanied by the practical planting of the saplings.

Ultimately, therefore, the only way even a truly ecological Christian spirituality can have a positive part to play in the solution to the present crisis is if it is actually physically lived out by significant numbers of people. It is of little use describing such a spirituality or even using it as the basis for our worship, if the moment the worshippers leave the church building and close the door behind them they continue to live in exploitative and unsustainable ways. Rather, the spirituality must be practiced in every day living, because it is the praxis that fulfils the promise of the spirituality.

Praxis means "transformative action". In the context of the ecological crisis that will require quite radical changes in lifestyle and expectations for the vast majority of the populations of the rich countries. That is why an ecological spirituality must engender a *metanoia* at the deepest level of our being, because

only such a fundamental change of heart will enable people to make and sustain the lifestyle alterations that will be necessary if we are to halt the environmental destruction that our present way of life continues to cause. Any thing less than this deep commitment at the very heart of our being would probably only produce shallow and temporary practical results. This is emphasised by Charles Cummings:

> The changes in understanding and behaviour that characterize eco-spiritual living will not come about without a profound change of values, a conversion of heart. Habits of consuming have to be replaced by habits of conserving. There will be no modification of consumer demands until there is a conversion of consumers' hearts.[38]

The reason for this is the fact that the changes needed will not just be the superficial ones of stewardship. Although using low-wattage light bulbs, recycling our rubbish, and using public rather than private transport or even cycling to work are all important, they are not on their own going to make enough of a difference to the situation. What is required is far deeper than any of these things and stems directly from the extension of the teachings of Jesus beyond the human to non-human nature. Sally McFague states that:

> .....Christianity's special contribution is to press a care ethic in the direction of the neediest – care for both the most oppressed people and the most vulnerable parts of the natural world.....
>
> .....in our time, nature can be seen as the "new poor", not the poor that crowds out the human poor, but the "also" poor, and as such it

[38] Charles Cummings, *op. cit.*, 1991: 133.

> demands our attention and care. Nature demands our love, as do the human oppressed.[39]

It is that last sentence that is the key to just what is really needed if we are to avert ecological disaster: "Nature demands our love, as do the human oppressed." This goes far beyond anything suggested by the stewardship approach which sees our care of nature as a subject/object relationship, a caring for the earth ultimately for our own sake. Rather, there is in this sentence an equality of relationship, we are to love nature *in the same way* as we love our fellow human beings. This demands not a subject/object relationship, but a subject/subject relationship and a whole new way of viewing our dealings with non-human nature. This is to extend the love of our neighbour to our non-human neighbour and give the same kind of commitment and compassion to both.

On the level of a reflective, transformative praxis, this would mean re-evaluating everything we do in our lives. It would mean taking the lead from people like the Jains and living in ways that had the least detrimental environmental impact possible. It requires living simply and finding pleasure in the company of others and in the natural world around us, rather than in material possessions.

However, it also involves a lot more than that. Transformative action could mean giving up our job, for example, if our work involved any kind of environmental destruction or suffering to any form of life. It could also mean resigning if the company we were employed by was acting in an unethical or exploitative way towards other people or any non-human life.

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[39] Sally McFague, *op. cit.*, 1997: 6.

The practice of an ecological spirituality would certainly require us to adopt a non-violent ethic. This would be necessary both out of compassion for all other beings and as a commitment to the universal value of peace. But again, this needs to go far deeper than protesting against the war in Iraq or wherever else America next decides to invade, although such protests are of course a vital part of the commitment to peace. Embracing a non-violent ethic also means protesting against the violence perpetrated against the poor in the name of globalisation and world trade. It means campaigning for non-violent farming methods and highlighting the mistreatment of animals, including demanding an end to all scientific experiments on animals even in the name of medicine. It requires us to protest against the violence done to nature through logging and genetic engineering.

However, there is in addition a much more personal aspect to this non-violent ethic in that it means repenting of the things in our own lives that cause violence to others and to the natural world and trying to change them where possible. Barbara Wood sees this as crucial to an ecological spirituality and calls us to "a deeper level of repentance for the violence in our lives", which she states:

> .....means discovering in a new way how violent our lives have become, and step by step dismantling the violence by examining the way we live, what we buy and use, and seeing how it affects others from the moment of production to the moment of disposal.[40]

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[40] Barbara Wood, *The Gifts of Peace: Spirituality and Ecology*, London: Pax Christi, 1989: 7.

Anne Primavesi echoes these comments as she links the violence in our lives to the loss of biodiversity on our planet, and calls for an ethic of non-violence to stop the destruction of species that is reducing the variety of life on earth and threatening the very future of all life. She states that the loss of biodiversity:

> ....calls for responsibility that goes beyond what I do to the attitudes which inform all my relationships. From the perspective of an environmental ethic, it embraces how I live, the kind of choices I make about lifestyle and my approach to consumerism. It involves asking myself certain questions when making those choices: Who benefits? Who loses? What do I contribute? What do I sacrifice? Is my spirituality other-directed?[41]

As well as non-violence and peace, an "other-directed" ecological spirituality requires an interconnected commitment to eco-justice; that is justice for all beings not just human beings. Eco-justice also requires us to reflect on the way we live and the impact that has on other people and the whole of life and making changes where our own lives cause injustice. In addition, it may mean campaigning locally against the building of a housing estate on land used by breeding birds, for example, or protesting internationally against multinational companies who destroy the habitats of human and non-human life alike.

All of these things are part of the practice of a truly ecological Christian spirituality. They stem from the universal values seen in the eco-Christ, the values of compassion for all life, love for every creature and the whole of creation, peace and justice for all species of life and the whole community of the living earth.

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[41] Anne Primavesi, "Biodiversity and responsibility: A basis for a non-violent environmental ethic", *Faith and Praxis in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Ursula King, London: Cassell, 1998: 55-56.

Furthermore, the transformative action of this spirituality reflects a different understanding of power. Instead of the "power-over" stance of domination (and even of stewardship), an ecological spirituality and praxis follows what Anne Primavesi calls "power-from-within" and which she describes as:

> .....the power we sense in a seed, in the growth of a child, in writing, working, making choices, recovering health. It has to do with the root meaning of the word power, from the Latin root word *posse* (to be able). It is the power from within the earth community which is present as connectedness, sustenance, healing, creating.[42]

It is through this power-from-within that a truly ecological Christian spirituality may effect the *metanoia*, the complete change of heart, that can sustain the transformative action that demonstrates that spirituality in the world. It is through a living out of the values present in the eco-Christ that we can rediscover our interconnectedness with the God who is the power-from-within the whole creation and our kinship with all other living beings. It is in the praxis of a spirituality which has as its starting point the entirety of nature that we may yet be able to contribute to the salvation of the whole living community of the earth from the brink of ecological disaster.

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[42] Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genisis: Ecology, Feminism, and Christianity*, Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1991: 220.

Conclusion

The aim that this thesis set out to achieve was the formulation of a particular type of spirituality. It had to be a spirituality that took seriously the present ecological crisis facing the world. It needed to go beyond superficial stewardship environmentalism. It had to be the kind of spirituality that would be able to contribute to the bringing about of the fundamental change of heart, the *metanoia*, necessary to alter the world-view and lifestyles of large numbers of people who live in the rich countries of the North. It needed to challenge those whose current attitudes and way of life are causing a considerable amount of harm to the environment. This was no easy task, particularly given the two other constraints that were also put on this spirituality; namely, that it had to be truly ecological and that it had to be recognisably Christian.

The first thing to do was to establish the context, to show that there was a situation that needed to be addressed. This was done in Chapter One by presenting evidence that showed that humanity is facing an ecological crisis and, furthermore, that it is a crisis largely of our own making. All the categories of evidence referred to are related to human activity and human use or abuse of the natural resources of this planet: the pollution of the air, rivers, and seas comes from our industrial and domestic machines and processes; the same is largely true of greenhouse gases; species extinction and loss of biodiversity are often associated with our farming methods; and we are certainly responsible for the rapidly increasing human population and the associated environmental degradation.

Before going on to look at why this ecological crisis had occurred and consider any response to it, it was necessary first to define the terms that were to guide what was to follow. Several different definitions of "Christian spirituality" were explored and their strengths and weaknesses from an ecological perspective were set out. I concluded that the widest, most inclusive definition possible was needed for the purposes of this present endeavour. The reason for this was that only such an all-embracing definition would give the latitude needed to fully explore the potential changes within Christianity that might be needed in order to make it truly ecological.

The second term which required definition was that of "ecology" itself. I looked at the history of ecology as a science and showed that, in recent decades, several branches of the science have developed. Each of these was described in turn and the conclusion was drawn that only deep ecology really took seriously the urgency of the present crisis. Deep ecology, therefore, would need to be the benchmark for the spirituality that I was trying to search for.

This conclusion raised an immediate problem, in that deep ecology and traditional Christianity are mutually suspicious of each other. Christianity sees deep ecology as something that is very "New Age" in its spirituality whilst deep ecology considers Christianity to be a major contributor to environmental destruction. So by the end of the first chapter, an additional task had been identified, that of somehow bringing together deep ecology and Christianity.

However, it was important to first look at how we had got to a situation in which ecologically-minded people were accusing traditional Christianity of complicity in human disregard for the non-human creation, as well as to examine what had been the response of Christian theology to those accusations. The answer to the first part concerned a particular world-view that saw the non-human creation as of no value in itself, but only there for its utilitarian and financial benefit to humanity. This perspective had become particularly prevalent since the industrial revolution and was most widespread among the populations of the rich countries of the North. Throughout the time that this world-view was developing, these populations were largely also influenced by the prevailing religion, Christianity.

Traditional Christianity, through its interpretation of Genesis 1:28 and other passages of the Bible, taught that humanity was given dominion over the rest of creation by God, and that nature was provided for human use. Furthermore, it taught that nature was "fallen" and therefore did not need to be held in any regard. At best, the natural world, including all non-human life on earth, was only there as a backdrop for the drama of human salvation. These doctrines and teachings effectively gave divine sanction to the use and abuse of creation to satisfy the needs (or greed) of humanity. Christianity was therefore part of the environmental problem.

These were the kind of accusations that characterised the writings of people like Lynn White, Ian McHarg, John Passmore and others in the 1960s and 70s, as set out in Chapter Two. Christian theology needed to respond to these detailed criticisms and show that it was not as black as it had been painted, but was in fact

greener than its critics thought. Christians defended themselves by referring to the "stewardship approach", as an appropriate ecological model.

The stewardship approach had its origins in the "stewardship programmes" run by many churches as a way of increasing the financial resources of the local church. At first there was no link with environmental issues, but after the serious attacks on Christianity concerning its record on ecology, the churches adopted the notion of stewardship in respect of the environment. This was done through a reinterpretation of the word "dominion" in Genesis 1:28, softening it down to mean something of a caretaking or stewardship role. A whole host of Christian theologians took up this new approach to the environment and stewardship theology and literature became widespread. So, was the stewardship approach the way for Christianity to become truly ecological?

One thing all the stewardship literature had done was to put the environment slightly higher on the agenda of the Christian churches. Furthermore, the stewardship approach did at least admit that the previous interpretation of Genesis 1:28 had contributed to the world-view which had caused so much ecological damage. Stewardship does encourage its adherents to adopt a more responsible attitude to the environment and it is true that some form of human stewardship of the natural world is now inevitable to safeguard the ecology of the planet.

However, the stewardship approach does not seriously challenge traditional Christianity in any way which could bring about the fundamental changes that are necessary if we are to change people's hearts and ways of life. Effectively all this

approach does is tinker at the edges of traditional doctrine and thinking. It still leaves in place the hierarchy of being which has God at the top, human beings next and nature firmly rooted to the bottom. It further gives the impression that God is some kind of absentee landlord who has left human beings in charge of the environment as managers in the landlord's absence, all of which makes the God – human – earth relationship seem almost legalistic. It still leaves humanity in charge of non-human nature which is left with no say in the process. Indeed, stewardship leaves nature in the hands of humanity for its management and dependent upon humanity for its salvation. It is, therefore, still thoroughly anthropocentric.

I therefore concluded in Chapter Two that the stewardship approach is at best a "first step" which does at least put the environmental questions into the domain of the churches and does encourage Christians to lead a more ecologically sound life-style. However, even this is presented in a shallow way which is unlikely to engender any deep change of heart on behalf of individual Christians or the churches as a whole. Furthermore, because of its reluctance to really challenge the doctrines and beliefs of traditional western Christianity, stewardship is unlikely to lead to a truly ecological Christian spirituality.

Having reached that conclusion, it became necessary to look beyond stewardship in the search for such a spirituality. However, any challenge to traditional Christianity that went deeper than stewardship theology would be likely to be accused of not being Christian at all. It was necessary, therefore, to establish a credible "Christology", which would be the central theme of the ecological

spirituality I was seeking to formulate. Chapter Three began the task of establishing this Christology and looked specifically at the human person, Jesus of Nazareth. The chapter comments on Jesus' use of nature imagery in his parables and teaching, but also shows that his attitude to the natural world was ambiguous. However, this is not surprising considering the fact that Jesus was not living in a time of ecological crisis and so it would be rather unexpected to find him directly addressing environmental issues.

The value of Jesus for an ecological spirituality therefore lay elsewhere; specifically in his own radical challenge to the religion and world-view of the people of his day. Jesus challenged the status quo and attempted to change people's fundamental ways of thinking and acting by giving them an alternative vision of reality – he offered them a new paradigm. This is exactly what an ecological spirituality would seek to do.

Furthermore, through his commitment to the poor and his embodiment of the values of compassion, love, justice, and peace, Jesus could be a legitimate focus for environmental concerns, particularly if his teachings were to be extended to include the whole of life on earth and not restricted to human life. Similarly, Jesus' death on the cross could be seen in the widest sense as an act of suffering love on behalf of all creation, so that every created thing might be given the respect and value due to it. Finally, the resurrection of Jesus can engender hope that even out of the ecological crisis we currently face, new life for the whole planet can still arise.

In Chapter Four I continued the development of an ecological Christology but shifted the focus from Jesus of Nazareth to the image of Christ. I began with the simplest image, that of the Hebrew "Messiah" and showed how this image of a redeemer could have value within the present context if it were once again extended to include human and non-human life. This image of Christ also has the advantage of not going beyond the natural or human realm.

However, as pointed out in this chapter, from the earliest days of the Christian Church, the view of the Christ as purely a human messiah has been seen as inadequate and the writings of Paul and the gospel of John contain within them notions of an equality between Christ and God. This notion exercised the brains of Christian theologians throughout the first few centuries of the Common Era. Eventually, at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E., Jesus Christ was affirmed as "perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood". This assertion is problematical for an ecological Christology because it appears to make Jesus Christ both different in kind to every other human being and supernatural. Therefore, to make sense of this in an environmental context it was necessary for me to find a new interpretation of the Chalcedon statement. This was done by affirming that Jesus was of the same kind as us (i.e. truly human) but was able to communicate the Divine in a way that most of us can only aspire to. In this way, Christ can be seen as effectively an "icon" of God, a window into the divine nature and divine values which can be used in an ecologically effective way.

The next thing to be considered was how this image of Christ could be fitted into the doctrine of the Trinity and the *persona* of the eternal Second Person.

Recognising that the traditional image of the Trinity had several drawbacks for an eco-theology, not least of which was the exclusively male language used, I explored some other trinitarian formulas, including Brian Wren's "Lover, Beloved and Mutual Friend", Sally McFague's "Mother, Lover and Friend", and Adrian Hough's "Gardener, Lover and Dancer", all of which had things to commend them but none of which completely answered all the questions.

So I looked at one further model of the Trinity, that of "Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer", which I do use in worship sometimes. When God is seen as Creator of all things, Redeemer of the whole creation, and Sustainer of all life, then at least there is some strength in this formula from an ecological point of view. However, it is open to the charge of depersonalising God and of being modalist. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that this is the best trinitarian model of those I considered.

Recognising that our language will never be adequate to completely describe the indescribable mystery of the Divine, I considered another aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity that could be used to the advantage of an ecological spirituality. Because of the interrelationship of the three persons, the Trinity can be used to mirror the web of relationships and interdependencies that are central to an ecological understanding of the universe, particularly if a cosmological model of the Trinity as 'differentiation, inner articulation, and communion' is used.[1]

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[1] See Thomas Berry, C.P. in dialogue with Thomas Clark, S.J., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*, eds. Stephen Dunn, C.P. and Anne Lonergan, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991: 15-16.

The cosmological model of the Trinity led me neatly into an exploration of the cosmic Christ. I first considered some unhelpful notions about the cosmic Christ before going on to look at how this image could be applied to the values of love and peace and justice in a truly universal sense; that is wherever these occur throughout the whole cosmos. When coupled with a more inclusive view of incarnation, this image of Christ can both ground these values in the human person Jesus and extend their liberating power to all of creation, thus also infinitely extending the scope of salvation far beyond the human. Furthermore, once we apply this image to the particular situation of the ecological crisis, then the cosmic Christ can become the eco-Christ and be the focus of an ecological Christian spirituality. Chapters three and four illustrate clearly, therefore, that such a spirituality is indeed possible and even Christianity can be redeemed from its environmentally destructive world-view.

However, for this redemption to occur it is vital that Christianity rejects any claim to exclusivity when it comes to divine truth and revelation and accepts that there is much it can learn from other world religions and faith communities. It is only by widening its horizons that Christianity can hope to fully embrace the changes needed to move beyond stewardship to a truly ecological faith. In Chapter Five, I set out some of the resources that are available to Christianity as it makes the journey from traditional to ecological spirituality. The object of this chapter was not to convert anyone to any of these other faiths, or to replace Christianity with any of them. Rather it was to understand how they had dealt with the environmental questions and discover whether there were any insights they could offer that would help in the formulation of an ecological Christian spirituality.

I began by looking at the spiritualities of indigenous peoples like the North American Indians and the Maori people of New Zealand. Their great respect for the natural world around them and their belief that all life and all things are imbued with a spiritual presence and an inherent value, can teach the people of the industrialised nations much when it comes to reverencing nature and living in sustainable ways. In addition, their conviction that relationships between people and non-human nature are reciprocal and sacred kinship relationships is important to an ecological world-view.

I then went on to consider feminist and ecofeminist spirituality. The feminist critique of traditional patriarchal Christianity has offered many crucial insights particularly into the use of language to describe the Divine, as well as into the destructive nature of hierarchical dualisms and the dualistic world-view that derives from them. From this critique there also arose an awareness that the plight of women and of nature were linked and ecofeminsim was born. With their emphasis on the liberation of women (and by extension all people) and of nature, the insights of ecofeminism are a considerable resource in the formulation of an ecological spirituality. In particular their insistence that an ethic of mutual interdependency must replace all hierarchies opens up the way to inclusive views of salvation and of being Church.

Eastern religions, too, can offer valuable insights towards an environmental ethic and it was these that I turned to next. Buddhism has a deep understanding of the interconnectedness and kinship of all things, as well as promoting peace and

harmony and a non-violent ethic. The Baha'i faith and Hinduism, along with Buddhism, encourage their followers to avoid increasing their material wants and to live simply. The Baha'is see salvation as being about community rather than the individual, while Hinduism sees God in every object in the universe. Sikhism challenges the dualistic world-view and regards spirit and matter as a unity, while the Jains strive for an harmonious relationship between all living creatures and believe they have a responsibility to every living organism in the galaxy. Furthermore, Jains have an ethos of *ahimsa*, which is the Sanskrit word for non-violence and non-interference. This leads Jains to be vegetarians and to keep their consumption of natural resources to a minimum, so living out their spirituality in practical ways that have a positive effect on the environment. Taoists also seek to live simply to reflect their belief that nature is of value for its own sake, not just for the sake of humans. Many of these eastern religions, therefore, can contribute to an ecological spirituality.

However, as I discovered in the next section of this chapter, there are also valuable resources within non-western forms of Christianity. The Orthodox Church teaches that the natural world is both a sign and a sacrament of God and therefore within the realms of Christ's saving activity. In addition, Orthodoxy uses the term *oikos* to describe the whole creation. This term has reflections of Gaia within it as it refers to the world as an organic whole where all things are in relationship with all other things. Although humans are still seen as effectively the managers of this *oikos*, there are nevertheless important insights within this Orthodox image that can engender an ecological world-view.

Liberation theology has something to offer to ecological discourse as well. Just as ecofeminist theologians came to see a connection between the mistreatment of women and of nature, so liberation theologians are seeing a similar correlation between the attitude of the rich nations towards the poor and the natural world. The particular contributions that liberation theology can make to an eco-theology are the notion of a shift in the starting point for theological reflection (i.e. from the human to creation as a whole) and the commitment to transformative action (praxis).

It is transformative action that typifies the African Earthkeeping Churches. Faced with deforestation and the resultant desertification, these Churches have set about transforming their land through the planting of new trees. Where they differ from other tree-planting initiatives is that the tree planting is part of a Eucharistic service. The saplings are referred to as brothers and sisters and friends of the human communicants. These young trees are seen both as participants in the worship and as encompassed by the notion of salvation, which is understood as being about the Christian commitment to the healing of all creation in this life. In the churches of this country we often have problems accepting Christians from different denominations around the Lord's Table, how would we cope with trees? The African Earthkeeping Churches have much to teach us.

We can also learn from a much more ancient Christian tradition, that of Celtic Christianity, which has retained a belief in the presence of the Divine in all things, and understands the interconnectedness of all that is. Once Christianity widens its horizons there is an enormous amount of resources that can be used to enrich the

religion and to encourage an ecological Christian spirituality as I have shown in this chapter, and I have only barely scratched the surface.

In the final chapter of the thesis, Chapter Six, I have attempted to formulate a truly ecological Christian spirituality, accepting that it is probably only one of many that might be possible because it has emerged out of my own particular context. I have tried to draw in some of the insights from Chapter Five as well as incorporating the Christology outlined in Chapters Three and Four. I have further shown that such a spirituality does not stand in isolation and must be linked to a theology, must be able to be encompassed and encouraged in worship and liturgy, and must lead to transformative action. This chapter, therefore, is divided into four sections, looking at the theology from which an ecological spirituality might arise, the spirituality itself, the liturgy that could translate that spirituality into worship, and finally at the practice, the living out of the spirituality in every aspect of our lives..

In the first section I outlined the kind of theology held by many church members and showed how open to change they are if offered an alternative, thereby giving hope that grass-roots theology and spirituality can be changed even if the hierarchies of the different denominations resist such change. I then explored the kind of changes that would be needed for Christian theology to embrace the ecological paradigm. Such a theology would need to reject all dualisms and hierarchies of being and see transcendence and immanence as a continuity rather than as separate. It would have to embrace a panentheism that saw the Divine as indwelling all things as the personal centre of all lives and all life. God would

therefore be a part of the natural and would be interrelated with the whole creation, making everything a revelation of the Divine.

This would lead to a much wider theology of the Holy Spirit, in which the Spirit is seen as present not just in "saved" humanity but in all people, all life, and even in inanimate objects. This understanding of the Holy Spirit would restore the sacredness of the non-human world and should have implications for the way we treat nature and the environment, because to needlessly destroy anything would become sacrilege. This notion, coupled with the image of the eco-Christ, gives a firm theological foundation for an ecological Christian spirituality. And while this theology does fit into a trinitarian model of God, I nevertheless pose the question as to whether this is the best model for an eco-theology, given the unity and multiplicity of creation? I conclude that it is a useful model but should not necessarily be used exclusively even in Christian ecological thought because to do so is to limit the Divine.

The truly ecological Christian spirituality that I believe comes out of the above theology, is very different in several respects to that of traditional western Christianity. To begin with, it means a move away from any notions of individual salvation, seeing salvation instead as about the well-being of the whole creation and every part of it. This leads on to a belief that every part of creation is intrinsically valuable and a shifting of the starting point of spirituality away from the individual and even from humanity alone, to encompass the whole living planet.

In addition, an ecological spirituality must be passionate and fired with the values of love and justice and peace and apply those values to non-human life as much as to human life. It must be a spirituality of kinship love for all things. Recognising our kinship with all life has another implication in that it enables us to realise that we share the same fate as every other biological species. Once we have rejected the separation of spirit and matter and the supernatural, then we know that this earth is our only home and there is no "other world".

However, far from being negative, this realisation can lead to a far more positive attitude to this life and this earth and even to death itself, seeing death as necessary for resurrection and new life. Indeed it is only by rooting resurrection firmly in this world that an ecological spirituality can offer the hope of a restored creation.

But even an ecological Christian spirituality cannot offer such a hope unless it is translated into action. The first step on the way to doing this within the context of a worshipping community can be through the liturgy used in services. Transformation of the liturgy of the church is therefore a necessary part of bringing an ecological spirituality to the people and encouraging them to live it out. In this section of the chapter I have given some examples of the language that may be used to achieve this. Essentially it needs to be non-hierarchical and fully inclusive, as well as celebrating the diversity of life and the God who is revealed in the whole creation. What is also needed is for the natural world to become a part of all worship services, not just paid lip service to once a year on harvest festival days.

Perhaps then, the attitudes of the church members will begin to change and a grass-roots ecological spirituality may emerge and be lived out in local, national, and international communities. The final section of Chapter Six illustrates how the personal and corporate reflections engendered in worship and the spirituality itself may be translated into praxis; into a practice that goes far beyond the shallow measures suggested by stewardship and creates the hope of real change. This transformative action follows a model of "power-from-within" rather than "power over" and lives out the values of the eco-Christ in the world so opening up the possibility of salvation for the whole earth community.

This, then, is a truly ecological Christian spirituality as I currently understand it. Purists may claim that it is not Christian enough. However, I would argue that the seriousness of the present environmental situation requires something radically new that has the potential to effect the fundamental change of heart that is needed if a solution to the crisis is to be possible. Traditional Christianity does not offer anything radically new and stewardship theology only tinkers at the edges. For a faith to be a living faith it must be able to adapt to the context it is in. In the context of ecological crisis Christianity and the churches must become open to different ways of thinking and being, or continue to be at best irrelevant and at worst damaging to the situation.

For ecological disaster to be avoided many changes are needed. In this research I have concentrated on two of them: the shift in lifestyle of large sections of the earth's population to an ecologically sustainable existence, and the shift in

Christian theology and spirituality to become relevant to the ecological situation. Both of these are still a long way off. This thesis is therefore only a step on the way towards what is needed. It is my hope that it will be a resource for the churches and that others will use my research as a starting point from which to develop new worship materials, new ways of organising and being church, new theologies and doctrines to contribute to this growing field and to the healing of creation.

There are signs that the ecological crisis is having some impact on Christianity. There is an ever-increasing number of web-sites dedicated to the subjects of eco-theology and ecological spirituality and new books appear regularly. However, there is still as yet little sign of change within the churches as far as I am aware. Where it does occur, it is usually along the lines of the stewardship approach. There is, for example, a group in Durham known as the Ecumenical North East Churches Earthcare Group, who encourage church members to recycle more, to buy fair-trade produce, to share lifts to church, and to use low energy light bulbs.

To the best of my knowledge, groups like this do not seriously challenge traditional Christian doctrine or theology, even though this is what is needed most in order to ensure the development of a transformative praxis. There is therefore much more work to be done, but I pray this thesis may be a useful contribution on the journey towards the renewal of Christianity through the creative use and acceptance of a new ecological paradigm.

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